

FirstGlimpse™

Improve Your Inner Space



September 2006
\$3.50 U.S. • \$4.99 Canada



Back To School Best Buys

Lessons In HDTV

Cool Accessories For Your Cell Phone



ROCK STAR

Docked and loaded. With unrivaled dynamic range and a sleek design, the two-channel, two-way iGroove™ HG delivers classic Klipsch power, detail and emotion. Compatible with any iPod® or portable listening device with a headphone jack, it's the compact standalone that was born to rock any room. See your Klipsch retailer or klipsch.com.

THE ULTIMATE SOUND EXPERIENCE™



PARKING

©2006 Klipsch Audio Technologies. All rights reserved.
Apple® and iPod® are registered trademarks of Apple Computer, Inc.



FirstGlimpse™

feature topic

CE Devices For Going Back To School

Backpack? Check. Folders? Check. Pens and pencils? Check. An iPod? Wait, an iPod? You read right. An iPod can be just as helpful to students going back to school as their brand-new planner is. And why stop there? CE devices such as a USB drive, a notebook computer, or a PDA can make the journey of a new school year more exciting and more productive than ever before. From grade schoolers to seasoned college students, we cover the CE devices that make going back to school fun again.

38 It's Another New School Year

The Tools Of Learning Have Gone Digital

40 Back To School: Elementary

Equip Your Kids With CE Learning Aids

43 Back To School: Middle Schoolers

Gadgets That Bridge The Intermediate Years

46 Back To School: High Schoolers

Gear For Grads-To-Be

49 Back To School: College Kids

Perfect Gifts For The Grad In Your Life

52 Editor's Top 5

Coolest Devices For Going Back To School

53 Lifestyle Close-Up Tips

Keep It In One Piece

Copyright 2006 by Sandhills Publishing Company. All rights reserved. Reproduction of material appearing in *First Glimpse*, Volume 3 Issue 9 is strictly prohibited without written permission. Printed in the U.S.A. GST # 123482788RT0001. *First Glimpse* (ISSN 1554-2106) is published monthly by Sandhills Publishing Company, 131 West Grand Drive, P.O. Box 85380, Lincoln, NE 68501-5380. Subscriber Services: (800) 733-3809. POST-MASTER: Send address changes to *First Glimpse*, P.O. Box 85380, Lincoln, NE 68501-5380.



On Our Cover:

Featured on our cover this month is the JVC HD-56FH97 (\$2,999; www.jvc.com).

Open

There's always something new, interesting, and stylish happening in the world of consumer electronics. That's why the Open section packs the latest news and trends into the first few pages of *First Glimpse*, along with the sparkle and bling that you can buy to accessorize your devices.

20 CE News

24 Outfit Your Life

Accessories With Style

25 Shopping Site Of The Month

Smarthome (www.smarthome.com)

26 His & Hers CE

28 Fab Four



A/V Club

Some of our favorite electronic gadgets are the ones that provide the sounds and pictures that move and entertain us and our friends and family. Whether you want to put together a wireless audio system for your home or just want help using the plasma TV in your living room, A/V Club can help.

30 A/V Shopping Tips

Find The Flat-Panel For You

31 Lessons In HDTV

HDMI Explained

32 MP3 Players & Hearing Loss

How To Keep Your Family Safe

34 HDTV Grows Up

Experience True 1080p With JVC's HD-ILA TVs

36 Tips

Organize Your DVD Collection



Digital Studio

Digital cameras and camcorders are changing the way we record the moments of our lives, from quick snapshots of favorite vacation spots to priceless video clips of first steps and other important milestones. Get to know your new digicam or camcorder and learn what to do with your photos and video once you have them.

54 Digital Studio Shopping Tips

Touch It Up With Photo-Editing Software

55 Become A Digital Camcorder Pro, Part 2 Of 3

Achieving Pro Results Begins With Pro Techniques

58 Photography Technique Tip

Colorful & Sharp Close-ups

59 Camera Phone Snaps

Where To Go From Here?

61 Know How

One Problem, Three Solutions

64 Tips

Frame & Hang Your Photos



CE @Home

The consumer electronics in our homes are no longer limited to TVs and DVD players. Smart appliances, home automation, and whole-house audio systems are becoming more and more common and affordable for families, and with so much available, why check CE at the door?

65 From Drab To Fab

Accessorize Your Cell Phone

68 CE@Home Shopping Tips

Buying Office Furniture

69 Gift Of The Month

Royal Digital Picture Travel Clock

70 Kids & Technology

Teens & Laptops

72 Tips

Make Your Home Conducive To Studying

CE Lite

Most CE devices are all about fun. Here, we'll tell you about the latest albums and films to catch, so you can make sure your entertainment is as up-to-date as your gear. Also, read what real women just like you are saying about how consumer electronics are affecting their everyday lives.

74 Music & Movies

76 Games & Gifts

78 What They're Saying

Do you shop online or in stores for CE devices? Why?

80 Exit



Editor's Note

Going back to school was always a bittersweet time for me. I enjoyed school, so I was excited about a new school year, but it also meant no more lazing around and sleeping in, either.

There is a slew of CE devices that can make that late-summer journey, as well as the rest of the school year, easier and more productive for you or your children. In this issue, we cover the devices that are perfect for students of all ages: elementary, middle school, high school, and college. The appeal of these devices often overlap, which is great for families with multiple children, and parents can use them, too. For example, if you have a daughter in seventh grade, letting her listen to classical music on an iPod shuffle might help her to retain information as she studies; her high school-aged brother can use the shuffle to tote his efiles from his school's lab to the PC at home; and you can use it while out for your morning jog. What a great investment for your entire family!

Like anything in life, approach CE use with moderation and teach your children the same. Set up some ground rules for using the computer, an MP3 player, and cell phones, even when your kids are using the devices for school-related activities. Consider requiring your child to help pay for a device, too, which will not only help him learn the value of a dollar, but it might also make him a little more cautious of not losing it at school or at a friend's house.

Life lessons, good study habits, fun for mom and dad; how cool that an iPod, or other CE device, can lead to all three!

Live well, friends.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katie Sommer'.

Katie Sommer
Editor, *First Glimpse*
katie-sommer@firstglimpsemag.com

FirstGlimpse

Editorial Staff: Ronald D. Kobler / Katie Sommer / Kathryn Dolan / Corey Russman / Rod Scher / Christopher Trumble / Calvin Clinchard / Kimberly Fitzke / Blaine Flamig / Raejean Brooks / Sally Curran / Michael Sweet / Nate Hoppe / Trista Kunce / Sheila Allen / Joy Martin / Linné Ourada / Ashley Finter / Tara Simmons / Leah Houchin / Marty Sems / Chad Denton / Nathan Chandler / Kylene Dickey / Josh Gulick / Andrew Leibman / Vince Cogley / Sam Evans / Jennifer Johnson / Nathan Lake / Holly Zach / Barbara Ball / Sarah Gabelman

Web Staff: Dorene Krausnick / Laura Curry / Kristen Miller

Subscription Renewals: Connie Beatty / Matt Bolling / Patrick Kean / Charmaine Vondra / Miden Ebert / Kathy DeCoito / Stephanie Contreras

Art & Design: Lesa Call / Carrie Benes / Ginger Falldorf / Fred Schneider / Sonja Warner / Aaron Weston / Aaron Clark / Lori Garris / Jason Codd / Andria Schultz / Erin Rodriguez / Lindsay Anker

Newsstand: Jeff Schnittker

Advertising Sales: Grant Ossenkop / Eric Cobb / Ryan Donohue / Bob Chester

Marketing: Mark Peery / Liz Kohout / Kelly Richardson / Marcy Gunn / Jen Clausen / Scot Banks / Ashley Hannant / Travis Brock / Lana Matic / Lindsay Albers / Jeff Ashelford / Brynn Burtwistle

Customer Service
(For questions about your subscription or to place an order or change an address.)
customer.service@firstglimpsemag.com
(800) 733-3809
FAX: (402) 479-2193

First Glimpse
P.O. Box 85380
Lincoln, NE 68501-5380

Hours

Mon. - Fri.: 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. (CST)
Sat.: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (CST)
Online Customer Service & Subscription Center
www.FirstGlimpseMag.com

Web Services

(For questions about our Web site.)
webhelp@firstglimpsemag.com
(800) 368-8304

Authorization For Reprints

REPRINT MANAGEMENT SERVICES
Toll Free: (800) 290-5460
(717) 399-1900 ext. 100 FAX: (717) 399-8900
firstglimpse@reprintbuyer.com
www.reprintbuyer.com

Editorial Staff

editor@firstglimpsemag.com
FAX: (402) 479-2104
131 W. Grand Drive
Lincoln, NE 68521

Subscription Renewals

(800) 424-7900
FAX: (402) 479-2193
www.firstglimpsemag.com

Advertising Staff

(800) 848-1478
FAX: (402) 479-2193
120 W. Harvest Dr.
Lincoln, NE 68521





Great theater deserves a great setting.

The beauty and warmth of real maple or cherry come to life in the distinctive style of new Woodbrook Furniture from Sanus. The fine lines provide a beautifully functional setting for your audio and video components, with convection cooling engineered into the cabinet design.

Customize each piece with flexible door placement and optional drawers. Come and browse through the woods at www.sanus.com.

SANUS | SYSTEMS

THE UNION OF FORM AND FUNCTION

www.sanus.com 800.359.5520

First Glimpse Special Product Section

This special product section is produced in partnership with leading consumer electronics manufacturers and allows us to provide readers with the most timely product information possible. Browse through these First Glimpse pages to learn about the latest hot products.

JVC's Everio G Series: GZ-MG37US & GZ-MG505US	6
JVC HD567BP7 HD-ILA TV & TH-C50 DVD Theater System	8
JVC LT-40X667	10
Klipsch iGroove HG	11
iHome iH36, iH30 & iH26	12
Altec Lansing iM Motion iM11	14
Mobile Edge Signature Tote	15
NETGEAR RangeMax NEXT Wireless Router	16
Nero 7 Ultra Edition	17



JVC's Everio G Series: GZ-MG37US & GZ-MG505US

MSRP: \$799 (GZ-MG37US); \$1,299 (GZ-MG505US)

www.jvc.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



No Tape. No Disc. It's Hard Disk Drive.

Everio is designed to eliminate any worries you might have when you're using your camcorder. Just keep on shooting, because the built-in large capacity hard drive easily stores hours and hours of your video inside a lightweight compact camcorder. You can also shoot thousands of digital still images, so whether you're at home or on-the-go, you'll always be ready to record or play back your memories.

Advantages Of A Hard Disk Camcorder:

- The longest recording times with the large capacity built-in hard drive, so you can shoot hours of video. Now you can

record events such as vacations, soccer games, and more without worry.

- No cost for or need to buy additional recording media. No tape or disc is required. The Everio G Series provides an all-in-one solution, ensuring no interruption during long time recordings, so you won't miss a moment. No media to lose!
- Direct access to scenes you want. No need to fast forward or rewind. Just click the thumbnail image and watch your memories come to life. Makes sifting through hours and hours of accumulated footage a breeze.

FirstGlimpse™

Special Product Section



- No risk of erasing previous recordings by mistake. You won't ever record over those once-in-a-lifetime events. Recording starts automatically from the blank space on the disk.
- Easy deletion of unwanted scenes. So you don't have to worry about getting it right the first time, safely select and erase entire scenes in an instant to free up disk space.
- Simple editing is made possible inside the camera, or you can create a detailed masterpiece with the included CyberLink editing software.

- With the optional Share Station CU-VD10 (\$199), you can create a DVD of your memories directly from your Everio* camcorder, skipping the PC.

*(GZ-MG27, GZ-MG37, GZ-MG77, GZ-MG505)

JVC
The Perfect Experience /

**JVC HD567BP7 Widescreen HD-ILA
Rear Projection TV**
MSRP: \$2,399
(includes free TV stand, a \$299 value)
www.jvc.com
Available at select Best Buy™ stores
and www.bestbuy.com



What Is The "Perfect Experience"?

The most amazing picture imaginable is what you will see with JVC's line of HD-ILA rear-projection televisions.

JVC's HD567BP7 56-inch widescreen model is built on JVC's three-chip D-ILA technology, a revolutionary microdisplay technology that will give you the most incredible picture you can imagine. Packed with tons of cool new features, JVC delivers the most technologically advanced and superior microdisplay televisions available today.

Picture Perfect Quality

JVC's exclusive three-color chip technology provides a superior high-contrast, flicker-free image. D-ILA is also brighter and more natural than other microdisplay technologies. A built-in ATSC tuner allows you to receive over-the-air digital broadcasts, and clear QAM (Quadrature Amplitude

Modulation) tuner allows you to receive unscrambled digital cable signals.

JVC's mechanical shutter insures that light output and contrast ratio are optimal for each video status setting. JVC's fifth-generation DIST with GENESSA provides 32-bit Turbo power picture processing to reduce jagged edges and increase resolution, and it detects and seamlessly upscales any video source to display at 720p. The 5-Point CMS (Color Management System) compensates for color range limitations and insures JVC colors are reproduced with dimension and vivid detail—colors are true and never tainted by surrounding or similar colors.

JVC
The Perfect Experience™



Non-Stop Entertainment

When it comes to your media room, we all want the best. JVC's TH-C50 (1200 megawatt) theater system is an excellent solution for any family's home, and it won't break the bank, either.

This system also delivers high-resolution progressive pictures. When playing a prerecorded DVD movie, the system uses Digital Direct Progressive Scan Output, which is a technology that delivers original progressive data without converting to interlaced data, so there is no quality loss.

Despite its extremely compact size, the center unit of the system houses a five-disc, tray-type changer. The small changer mechanism allows the unit to fit almost anywhere—even in narrow spaces such as racks and TV cabinets—so it won't be intrusive in your home's décor.

Connect your MP3 player, or any other USB device, to the center unit via a dedicated USB terminal, which gives you a direct connection without using a PC. This lets you enjoy MP3/WMA music files through the system's speakers with

better sound quality, or MPEG-4 and DivX movies or JPEG still photos displayed on your TV screen—with no conversion loss.

Video signals are upconverted to 720p/1080i for near-HD images when using the HDMI connection to your HDTV. The HDMI connection allows all-digital transmission of both video and audio signals with a single cable.

JVC
The Perfect Experience /—

JVC LT-40X667
MSRP: \$2,499
www.jvc.com
Available at select
Best Buy™ stores
and www.bestbuy.com



Literally, A New Dimension To Home Theater

The LT-40X667 widescreen high-definition flat-panel display was not only engineered to excite the most extreme audio visual enthusiasts but also to influence the creative minds of the most discriminating home decorators.

Along with its stylish cosmetics, the LT-40X667 takes into consideration every feature the demanding digital customer is looking for now and for the future.

The LT-40X667 includes seven adjustable aspect modes and Smart Picture technology to make it an ideal fit with your home-theater system.

Picture

- Provides high brightness, a wide viewing angle, and a flicker-free, high-resolution widescreen picture
- JVC's fifth-generation DIST with GENESSA provides 32-bit turbo power picture processing to reduce jagged edges and increase resolution
- 5-point Color Management System—Colors are reproduced with dimension and vivid detail so you see true color that is never tainted

Convenience & Sound

- Natural Cinema employs 3-2 Pull Down technology to drastically reduce the jagged edges that normally occur when film is converted to video
- Seven selectable aspect modes let you choose the aspect ratio to suit your preferences
- By examining the brightness level of incoming image sources, Smart Picture technology compensates for scenes, frame by frame, to insure they are displayed at the perfect brightness level without sacrificing contrast and detail
- Exclusive Sound Package—perfectly suited for premier sound, this model features 20 watts of audio with 15cm oblique cone speakers, simulated surround sound, and MaxxBass® for maximum bass response
- A full array of inputs and outputs, including dual HDMI with HDCP

JVC
The Perfect Experience™

Klipsch iGroove HG

MSRP: \$249.99

www.klipsch.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



Turn Your iPod® Into An Entertainment System

Born to rock any room, the iGroove HG is a convenient all-in-one digital music system that delivers audiophile-quality sound everywhere you need it. With its stunning high-gloss black finish and class-leading technology, this dynamic performer turns iPods and MP3 players into high-style, high-performance entertainment systems.

The iGroove HG works not only with iPod, but with most all MP3 player brands, as well as any gadget that has an audio out or headphone jack utilizing a standard miniplug, including cell phones, gaming machines, and portable satellite radios. All third- and fourth-generation dockable iPods dock into the unit for charging. Special iPod mini and nano adaptors come with the system for secure docking, while the shuffle and other devices connect via the included universal J-cup adaptor.

A true two-way system, the iGroove HG gets its dynamic soul courtesy of dual 2.5-inch woofers in a ported enclosure, premium crossover networks, and dual 1-inch MicroTractrix

horn-loaded tweeters. The iGroove HG is the only speaker system in this category utilizing horn technology, a highly efficient design that reproduces genuine, lifelike sound.

In addition to easily filling a room with smooth, crisp sound, the iGroove HG is also extremely simple to operate. All you have to do is plug it in, pop in an iPod, and press play. The included IR (infrared) handheld remote handles full system control, while the integrated handle makes toting it around a breeze. So, are you ready to get your iGroove on?



FirstGlimpse™

Special Product Section



iHome iH36 (Under Cabinet iPod Stereo)

MSRP: \$199.99

www.ihomeaudio.com

Available at select Best Buy™
stores and www.bestbuy.com



**iHome iH30
(iPod Boom Box)**
MSRP: \$149.99
www.ihomeaudio.com



Move & Groove To Your iPod

iH36 (Under Cabinet iPod Stereo)

iHome is ready to outfit spaces of any size with one of its most advanced offerings to date, the iH36. The unit fits snugly under a cabinet and has a host of features including: rich, powerful sound; the ability to charge and play all iPods; FM, TV and Weather channels; timer; remote control; and a 3-line display that shows song title and track number.

iH30 (iPod Boom Box)

With its big sound that won't hurt your wallet, the iH30 is the ultimate boom box for your iPod. Featuring 4-inch speakers that emit powerful sound; a car adaptor that lets you use it on the road; and a battery option for portable use, the iH30 is perfect for the beach, the boardwalk, or the bedroom.

FirstGlimpse™

Special Product Section



iHome iH26 (Portable Travel iPod® Music System)

MSRP: \$99.99

www.ihomeaudio.com

iH26 (Portable Travel iPod® Music System)

With its sleek design, protective carrying case, and host of features, the iH26 is the ultimate portable alarm clock for your iPod. Its built-in docks allow you to charge both the iPod and iPod shuffle simultaneously. Perfect for business trips, camping, picnics, or any family getaway, the iH26 brings high quality sound and alarm features wherever you go!

iHome
the home system for your iPod®



Altec Lansing iM Motion iM11

MSRP: \$99.95

www.alteclansing.com

Available at select Best Buy™ stores and www.bestbuy.com



Portable Sound For A Compact Budget

This is the system that will get you started. The inMotion iM11 lets you listen to music on your iPod with robust sound while you're on the go. Fits, syncs, and charges your iPod, photo iPod, iPod mini, and iPod nano players.

Sound

An amplified extension of your iPod, the inMotion iM11 lets you throw your headphones by the wayside and delivers high quality, crystal-clear sound whenever and wherever you are.

Mobile

The compact, lightweight speaker system that goes just about anywhere you want to listen to music.

Made For:

- iPods with a color display
- iPod nano

- iPod mini
- iPod with dock connector

Charged

The inMotion iM11 automatically recharges your iPod when plugged in and docked.

Unplugged

The inMotion iM11's long battery life gives you complete freedom.

 **ALTEC LANSING®**
inMotion™
PORTABLE AUDIO

Mobile Edge Signature Tote

MSRP: \$99.99

www.mobileedge.com



The Best Laptop Tote Ever

The stylish Signature Tote is the latest addition to the Mobile Edge Tote Collection. Incorporating over four years of actual user input, Mobile Edge feels this is the best computer tote it's ever offered.

Designer styling, highlighted by stainless steel buckles and accent straps with contrasting stitching, the Signature Tote is the most well appointed notebook tote on the market. Choose from the tan and black Mobile Edge insignia pattern or sleek black faux croc.

Beyond the Signature Tote's impressive exterior lies all the technology you need, including Mobile Edge's Exclusive

Wireless Security Shield to insulate your cell phone and PDA from hackers, dedicated SafetyCell Computer Protection Compartment, a detachable cell phone pouch, and a removable matching wristlet to carry your necessities for social occasions.

MOBILE EDGE
Bring It On.

FirstGlimpse™

Special Product Section

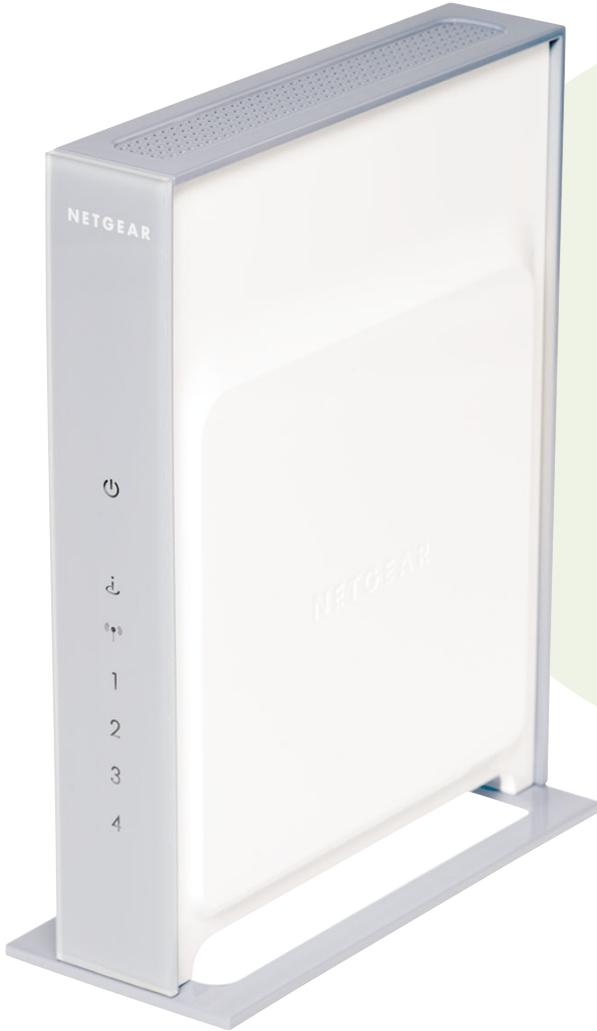
NETGEAR RangeMax NEXT

Wireless Router

MSRP: \$129.99

www.netgear.com

Available at select Best Buy™
stores and www.bestbuy.com



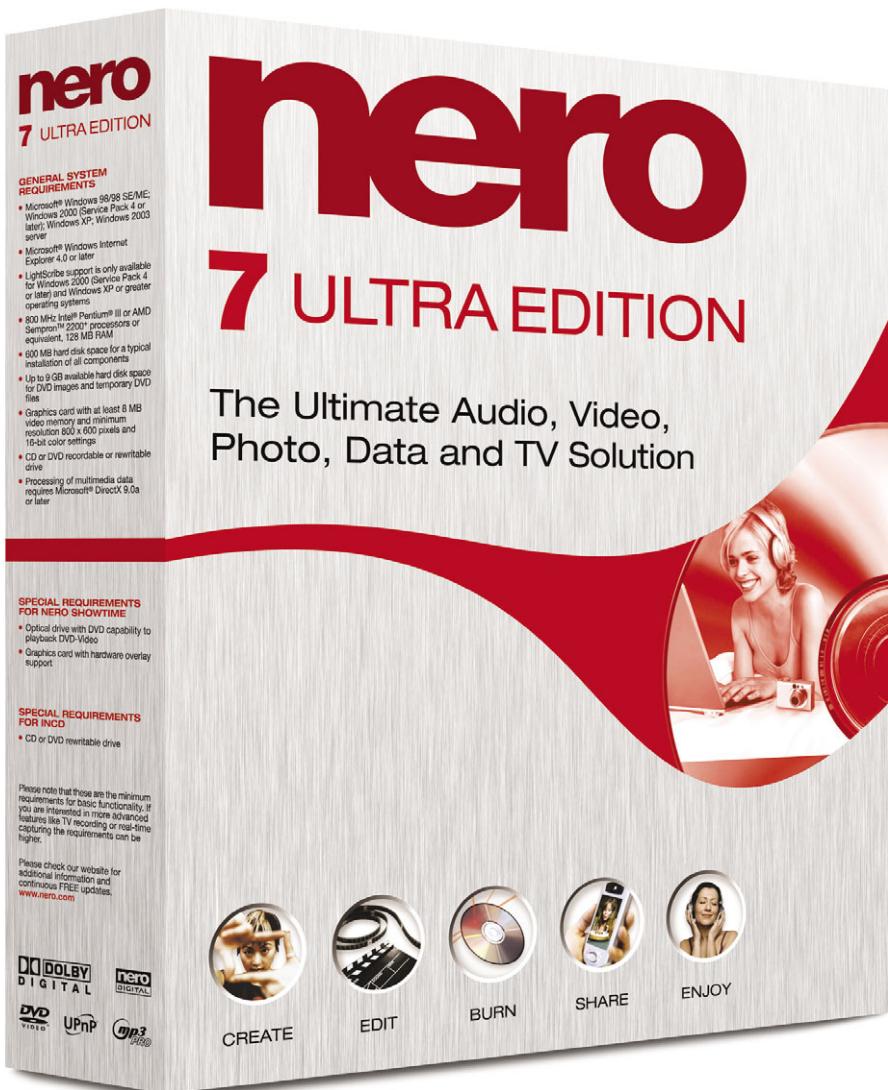
Extend The Possibilities Of Your Wireless Home

What is RangeMax NEXT? It's a router that extends the possibilities of your wireless home network by providing a steady stream of up to 270Mbps, and is compliant with draft 802.11n. This next-generation wireless standard utilizes advanced MIMO (Multi-In, Multi-Out) technology, which delivers incredible speed and range and, for the first time, provides wireless interoperability at the highest speeds with other products with Intensi-fi™.

A RangeMax NEXT wireless network creates and maintains stable connections and enough bandwidth to surf the Internet, download MP3s, make Internet phone calls, share files, play network games, and stream high-definition videos, simultaneously at any distance or location in the home or office. Because RangeMax NEXT is compatible with all legacy b and g wireless products, you are sure to be connected.

Preset internal antennas and draft 11n-True-Test high-performance testing and tuning, provides maximum performance and high-quality streaming every time. Setup is simple thanks to NETGEAR's Smart Wizard and 24/7 technical support.

NETGEAR®



Nero 7 Ultra Edition

MSRP: \$99.99 in box;
\$79.99 download
www.nero.com
Available at select
Best Buy™ stores and
www.bestbuy.com



The Ultimate Audio, Video, Photo, Data & TV Solution

Nero 7 Ultra Edition allows you to capture, create, edit, author, burn, back up, and share while providing the complete home entertainment experience. Create entertaining slideshows of your photos and videos, edit your home videos with animated 3D menu templates for professional-quality DVDs, burn a backup of non-copy protected DVDs, convert your audio and video files into MPEG-4 (Nero Digital™) and share on consumer electronics devices, or burn on CD/DVD/BD/HD DVD. Manage your media files with a click of your remote control with new Nero Home media manager. Includes 18 applications in one powerful solution.

Nero 7 Ultra Edition is available from www.nero.com or from participating retailers such as Best Buy (www.bestbuy.com), Fry's (www.frys.com), CompUSA (www.compusa.com), Office Depot (www.officedepot.com), Circuit City (www.circuitcity.com), and Amazon.com.

nero

COME TOGETHER



With DECT 6.0 (digital enhanced cordless telecommunications) technology and multiple handsets that can store individual buddy lists, you can talk free and enjoy digital interference-free communication from any room in the house.

Add the ability to conference in two VoIP users from different providers — and you have a VoIP cordless phone that puts every imaginable feature right at your fingertips.

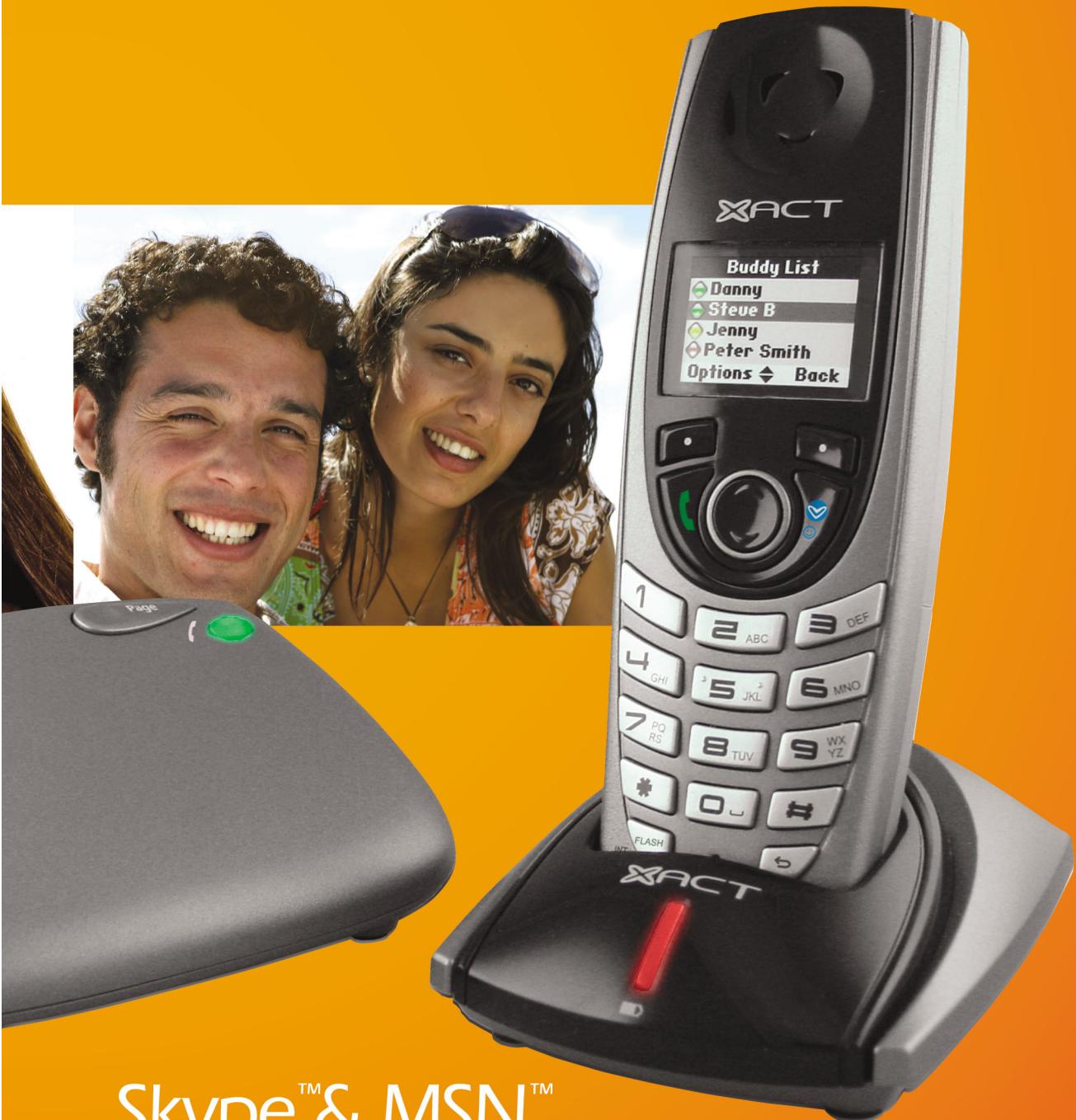
iVo brings it all together. To find out more, contact us at 1-866-466-XACT or info@xactcommunication.com.



All technical information, features, cosmetics and specifications are subject to change without notice.
Certain items shown may be subject to approval by FCC. No guarantee can be made to their future availability

TALKING FREE OVER THE INTERNET

just got easier, thanks to iVo™.
With iVo™ you can combine buddy lists
from both **Skype** and **MSN**.



Skype™ & MSN™

ONE-TOUCH ACCESS TO MULTIPLE
BUDDY LISTS — THAT'S iVo™
AND ONLY THE XACT DECT 6.0.
VOIP PHONE HAS IT.

XACT™
www.getxact.com

open

ce news

COMPILED BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH



New Nokia Flagship Store Sells Luxury Vertu Phones

Nokia's flagship U.S. store opened on the Magnificent Mile of Chicago's upscale North Michigan Avenue. That's fitting, considering the 2,450-square-foot store sells, among other phones, the high-end Vertu (www.vertu.com) line, which retail for \$5,000 to more than \$90,000. Vertu's Signature Diamond Collection, for instance, includes custom-made phones with either a platinum finish and 0.25-carat solitary diamond or 18-carat yellow

or white gold finish with pavé or half-pavé diamonds. Vertu craftsmen work as many as seven days setting about 700 diamonds by hand on the phones.

The Michigan Avenue store sells Vertu phones in a dedicated boutique, roped off from the rest of the retail space, where shoppers can find the latest Nokia models, such as the Nokia N91 (\$599.99; www.nokiausa.com).

Nokia (www.nokiausa.com) opened its first retail store in Moscow last December. The Chicago Nokia store is the first of 18 stores that Nokia, the world's largest cell phone maker, plans to open in the United States, including one on New York City's Fifth Avenue. Motorola (www.motorola.com/us), based in nearby Schaumburg, Ill., leads all cell phone makers in sales of mobile phones in the United States.



CE Vending Machines Popping Up Across America

As you zip through the airport, you realize you left your digital camera at home. Thanks to new Sony Electronics vending machines, called Sony Access, you can replace your digital camera before boarding the plane so you don't get stuck with grainy images from a disposable camera. In addition to digicams, the vending machines sell items such as recordable media, batteries, headphones, and Walkman MP3 players to shoppers in malls and airports throughout the United States. Costs for these products, according to Sony, are comparable to retail prices in Sony Style stores (www.sonystyle.com).

In June, the first Sony Access machines, which are operated by Zoom Systems (www.zoomsystems.com), appeared in malls in Santa Rosa, Calif.; Boulder, Colo.; and Atlanta, Ga. In July, a Sony machine was placed in the Indianapolis International Airport, with six more scheduled for placement in other airports and malls by the end of the year. A Sony spokesperson said the company has tentative plans to place the vending machines in grocery stores, too.

Panasonic Image Gallery Turns HDTV Sets Into Works Of Art

An HDTV may be a thing of beauty all by itself, but if you want to use your set to display great works of art or stunning photography, you can do that, too, with HD images from GalleryPlayer (www.galleryplayer.com).

You can buy the HD images in this collection, including paintings by Monet, Michelangelo, Renoir, and da Vinci, plus photographs from magazines, such as *Life* and *National Geographic*, for 99 cents and up. In addition, the no-cost GalleryPlayer software, which you'll need to download to a Windows XP or Windows XP Media Center PC, includes free images. Once you connect your PC to your HDTV and upload the photos, the GalleryPlayer's Smart Display technology automatically adjusts the images to the size and resolution of your display.

According to a GalleryPlayer spokesperson, the company plans to release a series of widescreen DVD collections (\$34.99) of HD images. The first two sets in this series contain 30 da Vinci and Monet masterpieces licensed from museums and private collections from around the world.

For your Panasonic plasma HDTV, complete the museum-quality look with customized frames. Visit the Panasonic Web site (www.panasonic.com) to buy the customized frames and download the GalleryPlayer software and images.



DirecTV's Titanium Tier Offers Everything—For \$7,500

DirecTV (www.directv.com) is offering a new service tier, the Titanium Package, that includes unlimited access to every channel offered by the satellite broadcaster. Cost for the "everything package," which will be limited to several hundred subscriptions, is \$7,500 annually.

In addition to including all channels, sporting events, and pay-per-view broadcasts, the Titanium Package loans customers up to 10 HD DVR receivers and offers them 24-hour concierge customer service.

Sony Notebook Trade-In Program Gives Customers Product Credit

What's good for the environment is good for Sony customers. Under the new SonyStyle Notebook PC Trade-In Program (www.sonystyle.com), you can trade in your old notebook, including non-Sony models, and receive credit from Sony toward a new Vaio notebook or other Sony product. Sony will reuse, recycle, or properly dispose of the old notebook's components.

You can trade in old notebooks at Sony Style and Sony outlet stores, or you can mail in the old notebook for credit. To use the mail-in option, click the Get Started Now button at the SonyStyle Web site and fill out the form, which determines the value of your trade-in model. You'll need to provide your email address, so Sony can email you a prepaid shipping label for your old notebook. After it receives the trade-in notebook, Sony will email you a credit voucher that you can use at any of its retail or online stores.

Nokia Tops Converged Mobile Devices Market

The global marketplace for converged mobile devices, or smartphones, continues to grow rapidly, with Finland-based Nokia (www.nokia.com) leading the way. Nearly 18.9 million units of smartphones shipped in Q1 of this year, up 67.8% compared to Q1 a year ago. IDC research analyst Ramon Llamas says, "The lure of new products, combined with heightened competition among the vendors, should continue to drive the smartphone market to new heights."

Joining Nokia in the top 5 are Japanese companies Panasonic (www.panasonic.com) and NEC (www.nec.com), and Sharp (www.sharpusa.com), and Research in Motion (RIM; www.blackberry.com), the Canadian maker of the BlackBerry. Sharp didn't enter the converged mobile device market until late last year. Both Sharp and NEC shipped its smartphones to the Japanese market.

Vendor	Q1 2005 Shipments	Q1 2006 Shipments	Q1 2006 Market Share
(unit shipments are in millions)			
1. Nokia	5.45	8.16	43.2%
2. Panasonic	1.145	1.89	10%
3. NEC	1.140	1.79	9.5%
4. RIM	0.78	1.45	7.7%
5. Sharp	0	1.07	5.7%
Others	2.74	4.52	23.9%

Source: IDC

Notebook Failure Rates Higher Than PCs

A new study from Gartner (www.gartner.com) reveals that the hardware AFRs (annual failure rates) of notebooks is significantly higher than that of desktop PCs. The study finds that AFRs for notebooks is about three times greater than for desktops in the first year of ownership. Notebook AFRs range from 15 to 20% throughout the life of the system. Hardware failure, as Gartner defines it, is "any repair incident that requires a hardware component to be replaced." This could be anything from the feet on a notebook to the system's motherboard.

Motherboards and hard drives are the greatest areas for failure for notebooks less than two years old. According to Leslie Fiering, research vice president at Gartner, broken screens were the most common notebook complaint. She notes that manufacturers have improved notebook design—for example, by adding more clearance between the screen and the keyboard to protect the screen.

Average Hardware Annualized Failure Rates			
	Systems Purchased In 2005 to 2006	Systems Purchased In 2003 to 2004	
NOTEBOOKS	Year 1	15%	20%
	Year 4	22%*	28%
	Year 1	5%	7%
	Year 4	12%*	15%

Source: Gartner Dataquest

tidbits

U.S. wireless over-the-air **music services**, which debuted last year, will have more than 50 million users by 2010.

Source: IDC

Online sales will top \$200 billion in 2006. In addition to travel (at \$138 billion), the largest category of online sales is computer hardware and software (\$16.8 billion), followed by auto and auto parts (\$15.9 billion).

Source: Forrester Research

By 2010, shipments of **Wi-Fi cell phones** will exceed 132 million units.

Source: In-Stat

VoIP subscribers in the United States will grow from 10.3 million in 2006 to 44 million in 2010.

Source: IDC

The global market for **"edutainment toys"** will reach \$5.5 billion by 2010, up from \$1.7 billion in 2005.

Source: In-Stat

Roughly 10% of **new homes** being built have media rooms.

Source: Home Builders' Association

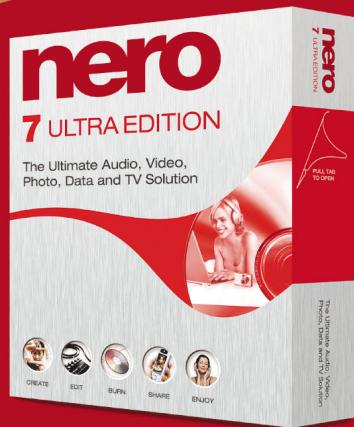


Choose The Right Tool For The Job

**The software for all
your digital media needs!**

Announcing Nero 7 Ultra Edition – The Ultimate Audio, Video, Photo, Data and TV Solution which meets all of your digital media needs. Nero 7 Ultra Edition is the only tool you need to complete the job right.

Whether you want to create audio playlists of your MP3s or entertaining slide-shows of your photos, edit your home videos, burn a backup of your DVDs*, convert your audio & video into state-of-the-art MPEG-4 (Nero Digital™) files, share your content on your consumer electronic devices or manage your media files with a click of your remote control, Nero 7 Ultra Edition is truly the only partner you need for today's digital home.



www.nero.com



CREATE



EDIT



BURN



SHARE



ENJOY

Available at participating
retailers, including:



* Does not copy DVD with copy protection

open

outfit your life

Accessories With Style

The grass is green, the grain is yellow.

COMPILED BY SEAN DOOLITTLE



Kensington FlyFan USB Fan
\$9.99 • us.kensington.com

Ah, September. The month between air conditioning and heating. Manage those random still-feels-like-summer days with this portable, USB-powered fan from Kensington. It has a flexible neck and soft nylon blades, and it doesn't need batteries. Just plug it in and enjoy the breeze.

Chums Video Flip
\$30 • www.kolobags.com

You can't go wrong with plaid in the fall. Here's a flip-face case for your 30GB or 60GB video iPod. It's made of sturdy nylon and features access ports for headphones and charging cord; you can carry it via carabiner, lanyard, or swivel clip.



Valerie Messenger Bag
\$249.95
www.abbinewyork.com

There's a problem with white after Labor Day? Not if you're carrying the Valerie bag by Abbi New York. Available in white linear leather with contrasting trim, this classic messenger bag has enough padding to protect laptops with up to 15.4-inch screens, interior pockets for your cell phone and PDA, and an adjustable shoulder strap. Even better, Abbi New York donates a share of every sale to world hunger organization World Vision.



Deluxe Electronic Bookography with Scanner
\$84 • www.levenger.com

Summer is ending, autumn approaches. Your book club is about to get back into full swing. Publishers are gearing up to release their major titles for fall. Keep track of your reading list and catalog your library—or even your movie and music collection—with Levenger's Deluxe Bookography package. Use the handheld USB scanner to scan cover barcodes into your Mac or PC, while the Readerware software searches the World Wide Web for information about the title you scanned. You can even dump your databases onto your iPod. Move over, Dewey Decimal System.

Shopping Site Of The Month

Smarthome

www.smarthome.com



ur lives have become automated. We have cell phones, PDAs, and email to stay connected to the world around us. But have you made the move to automate your home, as well? With no end in sight to the surge of improving technology and innovation, if you have not already begun to automate your home, now is the time to start. And no matter where you are in the process, Smarthome (www.smarthome.com) has products that can help you along the way.

Convenience, Safety & Fun

According to Smarthome, its goal is to make life for you convenient, safe, and fun. And it strives to accomplish that by making more than 7,000 items available for you to buy online, through the mail-order catalog, or by phone. All of us at *First Glimpse* mag enjoy shopping online, and we enjoyed reviewing Smarthome.com, too. If you're interested in receiving a print catalog too, you can sign up by clicking the Free Catalog link in the upper-right corner of any page and filling out the Request Form.

Choices, Choices

When you visit Smarthome.com, you'll see that you can shop using the categories listed along the left side of the page or by using the tabs across the top. If you're looking for a specific item, it's probably best to browse the categories, or you can type a keyword or part number into the Search Smarthome box in the upper-left corner to see what the site recommends. If, however, you're like us, and you enjoy discovering great deals and finding new things you can't live without, we recommend the tabs at the top of the page. Choices include New Products, Hot Deals, Auctions, and Open Box, and each category offers a unique look at Smarthome products and its own hidden treasures.

Check out new items the site has to offer in the aptly named New Products section. If you'd prefer to get updates without searching the site, click the RSS (Really Simple Syndication) Smarthome link to have updates sent to you via an RSS feed.

The screenshots show the Smarthome website's homepage with a search bar and various product categories. One screenshot shows a product detail page for a keypad lock, another shows a 'Hot Deal' for an HD signal amplifier, and another shows a 'Best Seller' for a shower extender. The 'Open Box' section is also visible, showing discounted items like a remote control dimmer switch and a motion-activated VCR.

When you're looking for a bargain, there are several ways to shop. The Hot Deals area includes hundreds of items that have been discounted; again, items are organized by category. Auctions are always a good way to save a few dollars if you're willing to compete for your product. Click the Register link to sign up for an account and see what goodies await. We found everything from a remote control dimmer switch with a starting bid of \$1 to a motion-activated VCR for a surveillance system with a starting bid of \$450.

Click Open Box to save up to 75% off of products that have been returned or used as demo products but still work. Although the packaging may not be all there, Smarthome says the products work just fine. Sales are final, but you can get a merchandise credit if the product turns out to be defective.

Although we've covered—if only ever-so-briefly—our favorite ways to explore the site, there's much more to see. You can also sign up for emails with special offers, get project ideas, and discuss your latest undertaking in the Smarthome Forum. The good news is that whatever your level of expertise, Smarthome.com will be able to help you take your vision of home automation and make it a reality. **FG**

BY JOY MARTIN



Each month, Vince Cogley and Trista Kunce, both staff members at Sandhills Publishing, share their thoughts about a device or two of their choice. They may not reach common ground on living room décor, but they both agree that CE helps them live well, just sometimes in different ways.

His . . .

If you want to read about colorful, underwater pictures from a tropical paradise, you're reading the wrong column. After dragging herself to the office for weeks on end and looking progressively more frazzled, my jet-setting counterpart took off to Mexico for some much-needed R&R while I stayed behind to languish in humidity and deadlines.

Fortunately, she let me take Olympus' tough, 7.1MP digicam, the Stylus 720 SW (\$399.99; www.olympusamerica.com), to the pool before she snatched it away for her *vacación*. A 10- x 20-foot concrete basin doesn't have quite the allure of the Gulf of Mexico, but it afforded me the opportunity to continue chronicling the "Adventures of Adylin."

If you remember, our last episode involved building puppy towers out of wooden blocks and toy dogs. And as every scrapbooking parent knows, you can't have a successful sequel without a swimming excursion. Although Adylin wasn't too fond of diving underwater, the Stylus 720 SW's waterproof design let me take it up close and personal without worrying about a child-sized tsunami obliterating a \$400 investment. Outdoor pictures were bright, colorful, and clear, and some underwater test photos I took were reasonably focused. The Stylus 720 SW's underwater presets made it easy to switch between taking pictures above and below the water.

The Adventures continued at a local park, where the Stylus 720 SW's Sports setting helped me accomplish a feat I had previously thought was impossible: photographing a 5-year-old ball of energy ceaselessly dashing over, under, and around playground equipment. Although my snapshots were far from something you'd see in the Met, they're perfect to add an 8- x 10-inch print to the wall.

I didn't test its shockproof claim (according to Olympus, the camera can survive 5-foot drops), but I took comfort knowing the Stylus 720 SW could take an accidental trip down a slide without suffering damage. As my cell phone can testify, short drops on hard surfaces can be a nightmare for you CE devices. However, I still wince at the thought of the digicam's exceptional 2.5-inch screen gathering scratches.



I know far more about HDTVs and PCs than MPs and ISO settings, but the Stylus 720 SW reaffirmed a lesson I learned when I compared images taken with a 6.3MP, D-SLR Canon Digital EOS Rebel: You can't judge a digital camera by its number of megapixels. The Stylus 720 SW's shots, while good, didn't come close to the Canon's. Canon's colors were sharper, and the overall image had better contrast. If you have the opportunity to make test prints before you buy a camera, by all means, do so.

But for a point-and-shoot digicam, the Stylus 720 SW proved it's capable of keeping up with the on-the-go family (and that's important). I won't say it's indestructible, but I would definitely take it with me on the continuing "Adventures of Adylin." **FG**

BY VINCE COGLEY

& Hers CE

I have a million adjectives running through my head right now as I'm writing this column and trying to describe to you my honeymoon in Cancun. I think three words—besides some of the obvious adjectives enjoyable, hot, relaxing, and breathtaking—describe it best: a photographer's dream.

I'm not a professional photographer, and I'm not even sure I possess a creative "eye" that the pros have that helps them capture unique, perfect photos every time. I am, however, an experienced point-and-shoot photographer: I see something, I shoot it, and I'm generally happy any way it turns out. Lucky for me I got to take Olympus' Stylus 720 SW 7.1MP point-and-shoot digital camera with me on vacation. (Also, because I took all of my photos at the 720 SW's max 3,072 x 2,304 resolution, I took two 512MB SanDisk xD-Picture Cards [\$59.99 each; www.sandisk.com]. I fit about 165 photos on one 512MB card.)

The 720 SW withstood my vacation better than I did. The shockproof (a 5-foot drop) and waterproof (to depths of 10 feet) features helped the 720 SW survive multiple dips in the pool, a drop from the dinner table, rain, humidity, sand, and being confined in the pocket of my shorts during a bike ride and zip line ride through the jungle. It still functioned perfectly (and I only charged it once on the trip) when I returned home.

Besides its obvious durability and impressive waterproof feature, the 720 SW is a typical-looking camera with a 2.5-inch screen and an average size and weight (2.3 x 3.5 x 0.7 inches [HxWxD]; 5.3 ounces). So, as with most of the cameras poolside, what attracted swimmers to the 720 SW was its underwater setting, which let me take clear underwater photos. The drawback to using the camera underwater is that it doesn't float. Of course, if you don't plan on swimming in water deeper than 10 feet or snorkeling with a school of barracudas like I did, then this may not bother you.

In addition to the exceptional underwater photos, the camera also took fantastic photos on land. I mostly used the 720 SW's automatic mode to take photos, but experimented with all 28 shooting modes. The Sunset and Beach & Snow modes captured evening sunsets and the blinding, white beach with amazing accuracy. In contrast, I got back blurry photos when I used the night modes; however, this flaw could be the result of my naturally unsteady hand combined with a slow shutter speed.

The Stylus 720 SW is the perfect camera if you're a bit clumsy or spend a lot of time in or around water. And, hopefully, by the time I save up for my next beach vacation there will be a new all-weatherproof digital camera that floats and withstands shaky hands that I can test for this column. **FG**

BY TRISTA KUNCE

Olympus Stylus 720 SW
\$399.99

www.olympusamerica.com



Fab Four

This month we looked at a new crop of devices from Kodak, Sony, T-Mobile, and industry newcomer, MusicGremlin. Two trends continue in almost all areas of CE—portability and convergence—and these devices are no exception. In fact, they prove the rule. This month's Fab Four can all do more things, in more places, and in smaller spaces. They don't slice or dice, but we think you'll appreciate the many facets of these multitalented new products, including Kodak's EasyShare V610 camera with built-in Bluetooth and the full-featured new Sidekick 3 from T-Mobile.

digital camera



\$449.95 • www.kodak.com

digital camera

mp3 player



MusicGremlin MG-1000 (8GB)

\$299.99 • www.musicgremlin.com

mp3 player

Why: Kodak is calling the newest camera in its EasyShare Pocket Series, "the world's smallest 10X optical zoom digital camera." Although we can't confirm that the V610 is the smallest digicam in the world capable of 10X optical zoom, its compact measurements—2.2 x 4.4 x 0.9 inches (HxWxD)—certainly help to back its claim. This dual lens 6.1MP camera comes with built-in Bluetooth and 22 scene modes, including panorama stitch to get those cool full-horizon shots. It also includes MPEG-4 video compression and image stabilization software to reduce blurring, and it lets you select single frames from video to email to others. Despite its pocket-sized proportions, the V610 boasts a sizable 2.8-inch high-resolution indoor/outdoor display. This PictBridge-enabled camera is compatible with the newest EasyShare docks and printers, as well as with Windows 2000/XP and Mac OSX 10.3 or higher.

Bottom line: Supercompact, high-performance, point-and-shoot digicam.

Why: MusicGremlin has an innovative approach to portable digital audio: It took out the middleman—your computer. With a MusicGremlin device, you can wirelessly download music files directly to your player. At press time, there were about 2 million songs at MusicGremlin Direct. Buy songs via a monthly sub fee or à la carte for individual songs. Selections include diverse artists such as Nelly Furtado, Willie Nelson, and Oscar-winning rap group Three 6 Mafia. The creators call MusicGremlin a "jukebox in the sky." Partnering with national free Wi-Fi hotspot providers makes it possible to legally share music with other MusicGremlin Community members to try and make music available to its users everywhere. If you can find a hotspot, you can find new music. The 8GB device has an FM tuner and built-in Wi-Fi (of course), features a 2-inch LCD, and weighs about four ounces.

Bottom Line: Wireless MP3 player takes portability to a whole new level.

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

phone



phone

\$399 • www.sidekick.com
• www.t-mobile.com

wild card



wild card

starting at \$1,999 • www.sonystyle.com

Why: By carefully guarding device details and images, and limiting its initial release to celebrities, followed by existing customers, and then the general public—who could only buy the phones at two brick-and-mortar locations (Madison Avenue in New York and Wilshire Boulevard in Santa Monica, Calif.)—T-Mobile generated a tremendous buzz before the release of its Sidekick 3 this summer. Improvements over its most recent predecessor, Sidekick 2, include a more compact design, a track-ball for one-handed navigation, and integrated Bluetooth. It also includes a built-in MP3 player, removable battery, a Mini-SD slot for expanding memory, and support for the three major IM services (AIM, Yahoo!, and MSN Messenger). It also features a full HTML browser, EDGE (Enhanced Data for GSM Evolution) (for faster downloads), a 1.3MP camera, and a full QWERTY keyboard.

Bottom Line: A cool new addition to the T-Mobile arsenal.

The Camera:
Kodak EasyShare V610

\$449.95

www.kodak.com

The MP3 Player:
MusicGremlin MG-1000 (8GB)

\$299.99

www.musicgremlin.com

The Phone:
Sidekick 3

\$399

www.sidekick.com
www.t-mobile.com

The Wild Card:
Vaio VA Series

\$1,999

www.sonystyle.com

Why: Because laptops are all the rage, a desktop really has to shine in order to win us over. The Sony Vaio VA Series, updated this fall with larger displays and more features, does just that. By combining a powerful PC and a high-end LCD TV, Sony has created a truly tempting desktop PC. It comes with a 17- or 20-inch display and features the same technology found in Sony's newest TVs. The black and silver towerless design is space-saving, with monitor, DVD drive, and hard drive all-in-one to minimize the footprint. It has a wireless keyboard, mouse, and a remote control, which increase freedom of movement and cut down on cords and wires. The VA Series is a great choice if you want a TV, DVD player, PC, and stereo in a top-of-the-line device. It also has a built-in PVR (personal video recorder), so that users can record and playback TV shows, too. And with the included software and DVD burner, you can burn recorded TV shows or other content.

Bottom Line: A new generation of desktop PC designed to do it all.

A/V Club Shopping Tips

Find The Flat-Panel For You

BY NATHAN LAKE



hen you see the variety of sizes and prices of flat-panel monitors, choosing one can be a daunting task. These tips will help narrow your options and determine what monitor is right for you. Cut this page out and take it with you when you go shopping.

Flat-panel monitors with a 16:9 or 16:10 aspect ratio are perfect for watching DVDs—most movies are filmed in those formats. The wider, shorter format is also handy for running programs side-by-side; you can track data and images without scrolling or resizing. Flat-panel monitors work best in their native resolutions, but larger LCD monitors require higher native resolutions because they need more pixels to fill the space. For example, a 23-inch HP L2335 LCD flat-panel monitor (\$1,599.99; www.hp.com) has a native resolution of 1,900 x 1,200, whereas the 20.1-inch ViewSonic VX2025wm (\$495; www.viewsonic.com) has a native resolution of 1,680 x 1,050.

As with any big-ticket item, go to a retail store to see the monitor you want and then do some comparison shopping online. We went to Price-Grabber.com and found the 20.1-inch ViewSonic VX2025wm LCD flat-panel monitor for \$328.99 (MSRP \$475); while the 23-inch HP L2335 LCD flat-panel monitor cost \$887.99 (MSRP \$1,599.99). Look for extra monitor features, too, such as USB ports on the monitor which let you insert your digital camera's USB cord into the side of the monitor instead of crawling around behind your desk. Built-in TV tuners are great for quick news breaks at your desk or if you're in a limited space such as a dorm room.

A major benefit of a flat-panel monitor's thin design is that you can fit a much larger monitor on your desk. However, placing a 30-inch monitor on your desk may not be aesthetically pleasing. Before you go to the store, use your current monitor as a guide to select a monitor size and bezel color that will mesh with your desk and room décor. Use the size and color criteria to focus your search for a flat-panel monitor.

The **contrast ratio** is the difference between the brightest white and the darkest black, or more simply stated, your possible color spectrum. The contrast ratio for flat panels ranges from 300:1 to 1,500:1. We suggest you look for contrast ratio of at least 700:1 for best picture quality. Ask to see a flat-panel with a DVI (Digital Visual Interface) input at your local electronics store. DVI support means the digital signal isn't converted to analog and back, so the monitor suffers no loss of image quality. Of course, your computer's video card needs a DVI port, and most new video cards have them; if yours doesn't, consider swapping out your current video card for one with DVI support. We found the PNY Verto GeForce 6200 available online at TigerDirect.com and BestBuy.com ranging from \$49.99 to \$89.99.

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

Monitor Size

Choose a size before you make a trip to the store.

- 15 to 17 inches
- 17 to 21 inches
- 21 to 24 inches

Aspect Ratio

Movies look great on the widescreen format.

- 16:9
- 16:10
- 5:4
- 4:3

Native Resolution

A larger monitor should have a higher native resolution.

- 16:9 or 16:10 aspect ratio/17- to 21-inch monitors/1,680 x 1,080 resolution
- 16:9 or 16:10 aspect ratio/21- to 24-inch monitors/1,900 x 1,200 resolution
- 4:3 aspect ratio/17- to 21-inch monitors/1,280 x 1,024 resolution

Contrast Ratio

A higher contrast ratio provides a greater possible color spectrum.

- 500:1
- 700:1
- 1,000:1

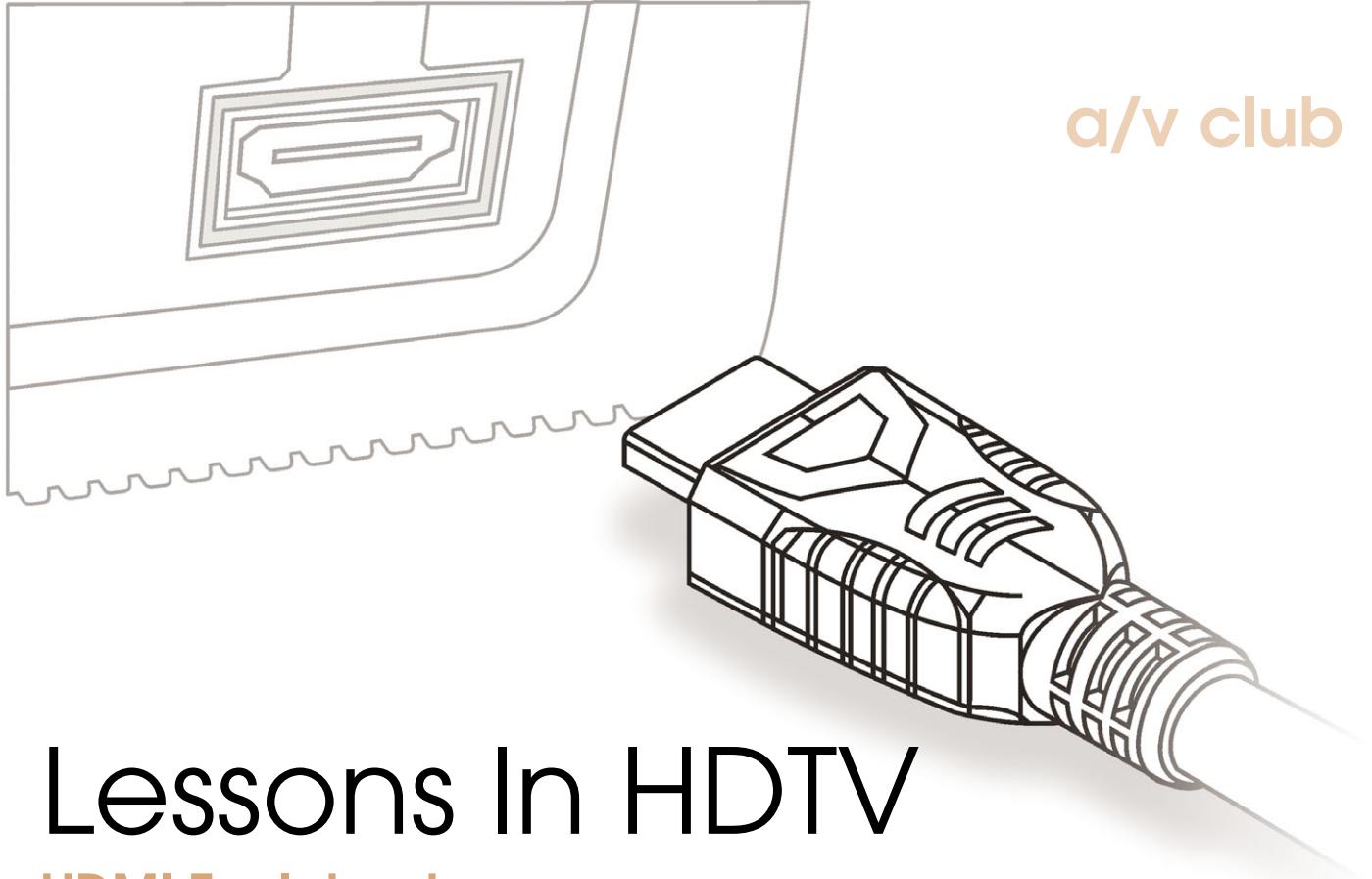
Extras

- DVI (Digital Visual Interface) support
- USB inputs
- TV tuner
- speakers on bezel

Deal

Go to the store and see what you want and then comparison shop online.

CUT HERE



Lessons In HDTV

HDMI Explained

You've probably heard the buzz about HDMI (High Definition Multi-media Interface), the latest standard for transfer standard on the block. What sets this standard apart from the rest? Here, we'll explain the features of an HDMI connection.

Nix The Unnecessary

HDMI is an interface standard that transfers digital content from a compatible audio/video source (such as your set-top box, DVD player, television and other A/V devices) to a digital audio or video device (such as an HDTV). It has enough bandwidth (5Gbps) to transmit uncompressed video and multichannel audio between sources. Because HDMI carries uncompressed digital signals to your HDTV and other devices, the losses associated with analog interfaces and their digital-to-analog conversions are no longer an issue. As a result, with an HDMI connection, audio and video don't suffer quality loss, and signals remain pure and crisp.

Room To Grow

HDMI is called the "future-ready" HDTV interface standard because it supports a gamut of current video and audio formats, as well as those that are still under development. It supports standard, enhanced, and HDTV video—the 720p and 1080i standards, as well as the newer 1080p/60 and 1125p video formats. As for audio, HDMI is the only interface that can carry uncompressed audio signals, but it can also carry compressed standard stereo formats such as Dolby or DTS (Digital Theater System). It also supports audio technologies, such as DVD Audio and SACD (super audio CD), and is designed to be compatible with future audio formats. HDMI is able to carry 192kHz, 24-bit uncompressed audio—meaning this standard will be able to support future audio formats.

HDMI is backward-compatible with its interface standard predecessor DVI (Digital Visual Interface), which is the most prevalent standard in use with digital CE devices today. The backward compatibility means that HDMI can

send signals to and receive them from any DVI-device in your entertainment setup, keeping them from becoming obsolete too soon.

On The Flip Side

All of these features make HDMI seem preferable to other interface standards on the market, but it does have some drawbacks. First, HDMI cables are very expensive and can easily add hundreds of dollars to the cost of buying an HDMI-enabled TV. To cut these costs you may want to consider an alternative interface such as DVI. Also, HDMI is not an ideal option if you need to use long cables. Once you exceed 15 feet of HDMI cable, your signal strength will suffer, which can degrade your audio or video quality.

These are just some of the features that HDMI has to offer. As long as the extra money's not an issue and you'll need less than 15-foot cables, take advantage of the audio/visual quality you'll enjoy with your HDMI-compatible HDTV. **FG**

BY ASHLEY FINTER

MP3 Players & Hearing Loss

How To Keep Your Family Safe

It's funny when the guy in the Verizon Wireless ads wanders around asking, "Can you hear me now?" But if you find yourself asking your children this question in real life—when no cell phone is involved—it may be a serious matter.

Earlier this year, the ASHA (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association) conducted a survey of adults and high school students and found that more than half of the teens reported at least one symptom of hearing loss. (Less than one-third of adults reported symptoms.) Although the ASHA cannot

point to a specific cause of the hearing loss, the results indicate that MP3 players and other portable CE devices (such as DVD players) that provide audio through headphones or earbuds may be to blame. Teens in the study were twice as likely as adults to listen to their MP3 players on "very loud" settings, for instance, a habit that can lead to permanent damage of the inner ear.

More research is required before a definitive link between in-ear listening and hearing loss can be established, but the National Institutes of Health told lawmakers in March that most experts are confident that there is a connection. The Mayo Clinic cautions listeners of

shelf Watch

Sonic Impact K1
\$299 • www.si5.com

Listening to your iTunes at full volume is guaranteed ticket to permanent hearing loss, but constantly squinting to watch "Kyle XY" on your video iPod's small screen can't be ideal for your eyes, either. With Sonic Technologies' K1, you can release your favorite iPod videos to a 7-inch widescreen LCD and built-in speakers with MaxxBass technology. Not only will your eyes and ears thank you, but you'll also be able to share the view with a friend.



portable audio devices that hearing loss may not become apparent for years, but once the damage occurs, it is irreversible. Kids rarely plan for next week much less 20 years hence, so parents need to establish firm volume limits.

The best medicine, of course, is prevention. By listening less and turning down the volume, experts say, you can protect the fragile hair cells in your cochlea, the part of the inner ear that transmits sound information to your brain. If you've ever gone to a rock concert and felt as though your hearing was muffled for the next couple of days, you've experienced temporary damage to this part of your ear.



Sony MDR-NC50 • \$199.99
• www.sonystyle.com

How Much Is Too Much?

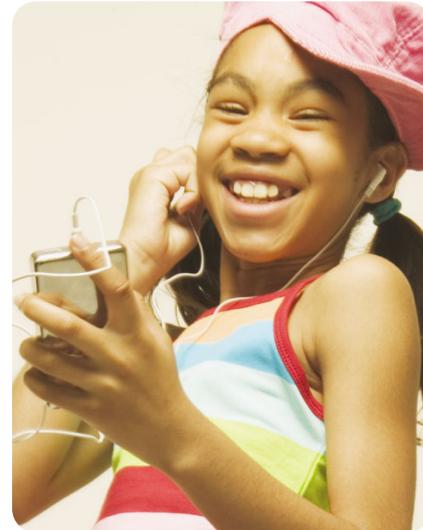
Prolonged exposure to any sound above 90db (decibels) can cause damage. Most MP3 players can produce sound up to 120db—the equivalent of an ambulance siren. Because your portable CE devices don't offer a decibel gauge, though, how do you know if you (or your child) are listening at a safe level?

The Mayo Clinic's guidelines suggest keeping your MP3 player volume at 60% of its maximum. If you can't hear conversations going on around you, your volume is too high. If the people near you can hear your music, or if you

have to shout when you talk to them, then you should turn down your player's volume to reduce the risk of injury.

To get a sense of whether you (or someone you know) have suffered partial hearing loss, ask these questions: Do I sometimes hear a ringing in my ears? Do I frequently have to ask people to repeat themselves? Do I find myself turning up the volume on the TV or the radio?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," a visit to a certified audiologist is probably a good idea.



Preventive Measures

Medical experts concur that simple things—listening less, taking breaks between listening sessions, and lowering the volume—are very helpful in preventing noise-induced hearing loss. Opinions differ, however, when it comes to recommending earphones. The debate over whether using in-ear or over-the-ear earphones will decrease the risk of damage is ongoing. One theory is that using noise-canceling earphones such as the in-ear E2c Sound Isolating Headphones from Shure (\$109; www.shure.com) or the over-the-ear MDR-NC50 Noise Canceling Headphones from Sony (\$199.99; www.sonystyle.com) can protect your hearing by blocking out background noise, thereby allowing you to listen at lower volumes.

One study found that in-ear earphones increase decibel levels by up to 9db. Although more evidence is needed to draw a clear conclusion, for now, if you are not using noise-canceling or sound-isolating earphones, it seems wise to opt for over-the-ear earphones to spare yourself that extra 9db.

Of course, both of these solutions require users to exercise restraint and good judgment. If you switch to noise canceling or over-the-ear earphones, but crank the volume even higher, then the benefit may be lost. If you don't trust yourself—or your kids—to safely control volume, and you are an iPod user, you are in luck.

Shortly after the ASHA study was released (and facing a lawsuit over its lack of adequate volume control), Apple announced a free iPod Updater download that lets users personalize volume levels. Parents can also use it to set their child's iPod volume and then lock it with a code. To download the software, visit www.apple.com/ipod/download.



Lawmakers, researchers, and manufacturers are all actively looking for the best ways to prevent hearing loss, particularly in young people. A panel of federal lawmakers was convened on the subject this spring, and both the National Institutes of Health (www.nih.gov) and the NIDCD (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders) are reviewing research on portable music players and hearing loss. Until we have definitive answers about whether certain types of earphones can protect us, keeping volumes down, listening less, and getting our hearing tested if we suspect a problem are the best ways we can protect ourselves and our children. **FG**

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

HDTV Grows Up

Experience True 1080p With JVC's HD-ILA TVs

t's Friday, and you and your fiancé have yet to plan your evening. A positive review of the new Spanish-Asian fusion restaurant in your local paper seems promising, and a terrific jazz band happens to be playing a set at a bar that's not far from your downtown condo. As you graduated to more mature tastes, renting a movie and staying in became progressively less alluring.

But with the arrival of BD (Blu-ray Disc) and HD DVD, picking up take-out Thai food, uncorking a bottle of your favorite German Riesling, and curling up on the couch to watch "The Perfect Storm" in high definition is an event to eagerly anticipate. With the right setup, you'll treat your eyes and ears to an experience that exceeds what you can find in a movie theater.

You'll need an HD DVD or BD player, but choosing an HDTV can be a little

more complicated. JVC's HD-ILA family of LCoS (Liquid Crystal on Silicon) TVs should make your shopping excursion to Best Buy a little easier.

Supersize Your High Definition

If you thought Dr. McDreamy looked good in "Grey's Anatomy" on your 27-inch CRT TV, wait until you see him in HD on the JVC HD-70FH97 (\$4,999; www.jvc.com), the 70-inch flagship of



the line of LCoS microdisplays. The HD-56FH97 (\$2,999) and HD-61FH97 (\$3,499), 56- and 61-inch TVs, respectively, compose the rest of the trio.

Although flat-panel LCD and plasma TVs are the natural choice for someone who wants a wall-mounted TV, you may want to think twice if you're planning on setting one on a stand or in an entertainment center. A projection TV gives you considerably more screen size for the same amount of money as smaller flat-panel TVs.

"You're able to pick up a JVC [70-inch] HD-ILA TV for under \$5,000," says Dan McCarron, JVC's National Product Manager, Consumer Display Division.

And unlike most plasma TVs and LCDs, these LCoS sets support the widest range of HD standards available today—720p, 1080i, and 1080p. Broadcast television has been available in 720p and 1080i, and with the arrival of BD movies, you can now experience native 1080p. You can bask in the breathtaking detail of "50 First Dates" on BD, and the JVC FH97 series is a terrific choice to display Hawaii's colorful, panoramic beauty as a backdrop to Adam Sandler's and Drew Barrymore's comedic performance.

LCoS: Tomorrow's Technology Today

Currently, you can treat yourself to three flavors of microdisplays—LCD, DLP (Digital Light Processing), and LCoS. Of the three, many experts agree that LCoS is currently a superior technology for a number of reasons. First, LCoS TVs don't suffer from the screen door effect, a problem that frequently plagues LCD RPTVs, and almost every DLP RPTV uses a one-chip design and spinning color wheel to produce an on-screen image. This results in the rainbow effect, a phenomenon that can produce a rainbow artifact for some viewers.

JVC's D-ILA technology impressed NASA so much that it uses the technology to analyze post-launch images. D-ILA uses three reflective chips—one each for red, green, and blue—and no color wheel or moving mirrors, resulting in a picture free of the rainbow and screen door effect. And if NASA uses the technology for detailed image analysis, imagine the incredible,

spectacular. Every pixel in a 1080p signal shows up perfectly on the JVC FH97 line. All three of the latest HD-ILA TVs also upconvert other signals—480i (or standard definition TV), 480p, 720p, and 1080i—to 1080p, so other formats such as DVDs, broadcast HDTV, and standard TV look better, too. Imagine the dramatic improvement you'll see in the

If there's one buzzword on the tips of HDTV connoisseurs' tongues, it's 1080p, the Holy Grail of HD.

artifact-free viewing experience the JVC FH97 delivers when you're glued to "CSI: NY" in HD.

1080p Without Exceptions

If there's one buzzword on the tips of HDTV connoisseurs' tongues, it's 1080p, the Holy Grail of HD. 1080p is the latest evolution of HDTV: A 1080p image is 1,920 x 1,080 pixels displayed in progressive scan (a progressive scan signal refreshes every line of an on-screen image every 1/60th second, providing a silky smooth image). Many TV manufacturers have claimed their HDTVs are 1080p sets; though that's technically true, there's more to the story than simply labeling a TV "1080p."

Most other competing sets claiming to be 1080p don't actually have the appropriate number of pixels necessary to produce a 1,920 x 1,080 picture and instead rely on various techniques to create a 1080p image. Although it's a technical difference and many companies might downplay the issue, very few TVs can upconvert to 1080p and accept native 1080p signals.

JVC's FH97 LCoS TVs can display native 1080p, so any 1080p signal will look

quality of a series such as "Biography," a program that isn't broadcast in HD.

"The buzzword [people] are hearing right now is 1080p," says Michael Holmes, JVC's Vice President of Consumer Displays. "If the customer is looking for the real 1080p, ours is a true 1080p: It's two million pixels, so it's the ultimate viewing experience."

Behold The Future

Currently, there are no 1080p television broadcasts, and other 1080p media has just begun to trickle onto our screens. Unlike buying an HDTV a few years ago, the HD-56FH97, HD-61FH97, and HD-70FH97 are equipped to handle the full transition to HD. Whether it's expanding your horizons with Discovery HD or indulging in the guilty pleasure that is Fox's "The O.C.," these TVs should have you covered for a long time.

"With the JVC HD-ILA, you don't just watch a program, you experience it," says Ken Mendez, JVC's National Accounts Training Supervisor. 

BY VINCE COGLEY

tips

Organize Your DVD Collection

1

Room To Grow

Here's a mistake so many of us make: We organize our movies, oh, so well, and then realize that the next DVD we buy means we have to shuffle our entire collection one slot over. If you're sorting your collection alphabetically, don't pack the discs from bookend to bookend. Leave space on each shelf or in each drawer for any new acquisitions you may buy later.

2

Training Is Everything

All of these suggestions can be helpful to you, but only if you remind yourself to put your DVDs away in their proper places when you're done watching them. This may mean training your significant other, kids, or roommate to do so too (good luck with that). And if you choose to loan out your discs to that rather unreliable brother of yours, well, don't say we didn't warn you.

3

Sort It Out

Neat freak, Type A, anal retentive . . . sticks and stones, we say. All you want is a DVD collection with some semblance of control. The first step to taming a wild pile of discs is to sort your movies so that you can find what you're looking for. Will it be in alphabetical order or by genre? Perhaps separated into his, hers, and the kids? Whichever method you choose, it will save you oodles of time later when you need a Hollywood fix.

4

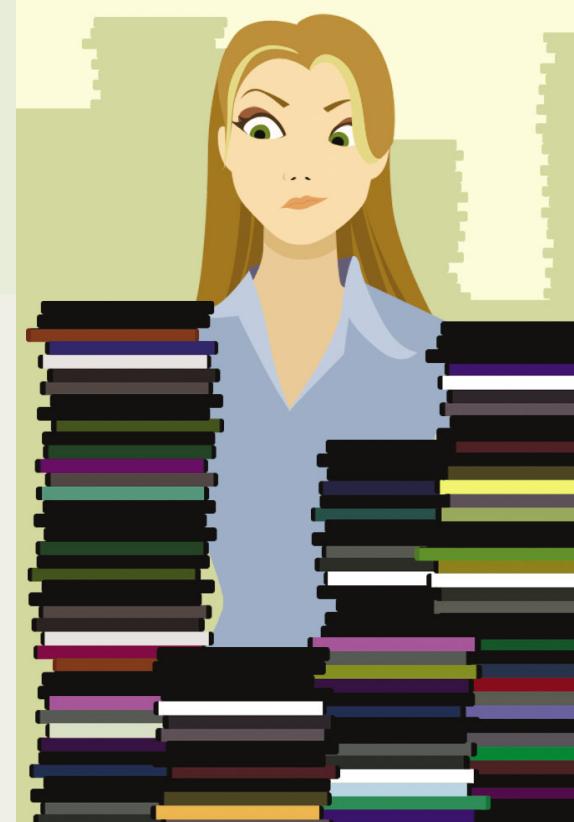
Log It

With a little effort and some office supplies, you can make it easy to not only organize your media, but also spot gaps on the shelves when they appear. Affix a white, adhesive label to each disc case's spine. Write a large number on each DVD's label. Keep your collection in numerical order and make a spreadsheet on your computer linking movie titles to their numbers, drawers, and shelves.

5

Don't Waste Space

Shop around for an entertainment center, TV stand, or media organizer that uses space efficiently. It's amazing how many movies you can store in pull-out drawers with shelves that run front to back and are accessible from the left and right sides. Make sure that the shelves are sized specifically for DVD cases. If you have several discs that reside in smaller jewel cases, such as those home movies on DVD-R, you might be able to fit more on a shelf by stacking them vertically.



BY MARTY SEMS

Business at home never sounded so good.

The new iHome iH5™ makes your iPod® earbud free. So you can talk on the phone. Tackle paperwork. And hold meetings in your home office against a backdrop of incredibly rich, natural stereo sound from our iH5 Reson8™ speakers.

The iH5 has a digital AM/FM clock radio that will, should you snooze at work, wake you to the sounds of your iPod! And it does all this while charging your iPod, so it's ready to go when you are.

iHome is home base.



winner
macworld
e d d y s



iHome iH5 • \$99.95

To order, visit

www.ihomedirect.com

Or call toll free

1.800.925.6224

30 day risk-free trial!



For all docking iPods® including nano!



iHome™
www.ihomedirect.com

iHome is a trademark of SDI Technologies Inc.
iPod is a registered trademark owned by Apple Computer Inc.
in the U.S. and in other countries.
*except iPod® shuffle. iPod not included.





It's Another New School Year

The Tools Of Learning Have Gone Digital

The ritual is as old as civilization—the youngsters of tribe and town venturing out to absorb the knowledge of their elders. And in this part of the globe, late summer is the cue to start all over again.

Until fairly recently, the most complex electronic equipment students were likely to encounter in an educational context was a projector whose operation was entrusted to one capable kid, but the changes of the past generation have been huge. According to a recent study by market research firm The

NPD Group, kids have been developing electronics savvy at increasingly young ages. They start to show real proficiency at age seven, and after that there's no stopping them.

Over the next pages, we'll address four age groups and the kinds of electronics they're likely to find useful on the path of learning. Here's a quick overview:

Elementary School (Aged 5 to 10)

This early, children are just getting the basics down and probably have as much expertise with the DVD player as anything. It's a great time, however, to start laying the groundwork for lifelong skills such as computer use.

With VTech's Nitro Notebook (\$49.99; www.vtechkids.com), a grade schooler can have a laptop computer just like Mom and Dad, except one that's age-appropriate, loaded with 80 games that teach language, math, and more.

Middle School (10 to 14)

By now, many children are electronics whizzes, with favorite gadgets such as portable gaming units. Although these are mainly for entertainment, they can help develop hand-eye coordination.

This can be a good age to start teaching kids responsible cell phone use. Keeping in touch has a new importance now that they're getting more autonomous, with schedules that vary because of after-school activities. Wary parents may find one of TracFone's basic models, such as the Motorola C155 (\$29.99; www.tracfone.com), to be a good starter phone. Because Tracfone is a pre-paid service, your enthusiastic talker can't run up huge bills.

A word of warning: Teachers consistently cite the unauthorized use of

electronic gadgets as a serious distraction in the classroom, so kids need firm limits on when and where to use them.

High School (14 to 18)

Given their range of pursuits and skill levels, almost anything is fair game for high-schoolers: desktop and notebook computers, cameras and camcorders, and practically everything pertaining to digital music.

It may also be time to start recording classroom lectures and group-project brainstorm sessions. Olympus' DS-2 Digital Recorder (\$129.99; www.olympusamerica.com) holds up to 22 hours of audio that will easily transfer to a PC or Mac.

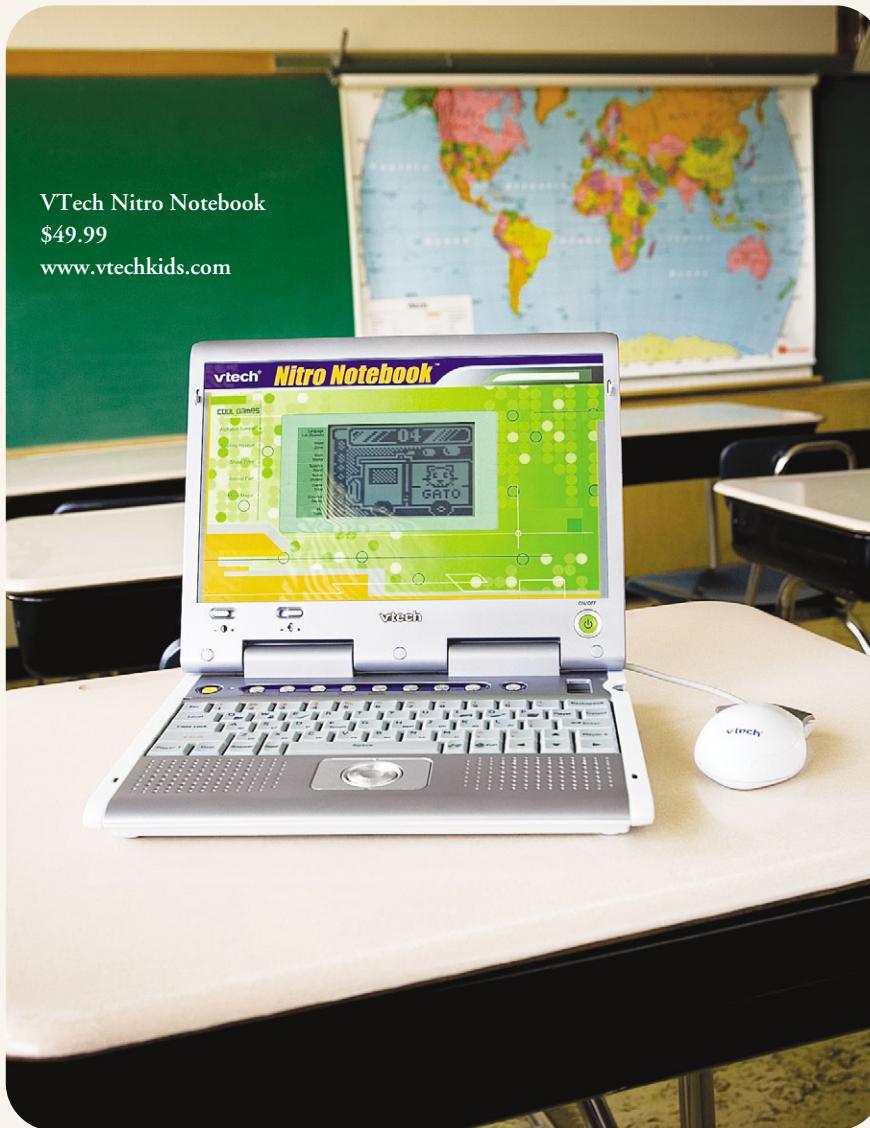
College (18 & Older)

For the college-bound student, computers and peripherals are obvious choices if your son or daughter doesn't already have them. But it's almost as important to send them off with some of the comforts of home, too—miniaturized, if their home-away-from-home is a dorm room.

When it comes to a TV, think consolidation and multitasking. Magnavox's 15MF605T 15-inch LCD TV (\$329.99; www.magnavox.com) is a flat-panel set that you'll be able to assign double duty as a computer monitor.

Commencement

There's much more ahead and not just in these pages, but in the years to come, too. Because electronics evolve so rapidly, students who develop an early, broad-based understanding of how to get the most out of these devices are going to have a head start on the future. **FG**



BY BRIAN HODGE

Back To School: Elementary

Equip Your Kids With CE Learning Aids



Barbie B-Book Learning Laptop
\$59.99 • barbie.everythinggirl.com

Included in the deluge of paper work that accompanies a typical back-to-school routine is the school supply checklist. This fall, in addition to equipping your kids with all the right items for the classroom, consider which educational CE items might help them with their learning at home.

Educational Toys

You usually can't go wrong with Barbie-themed products for girls. The NPD Group (www.npd.com), a Port Washington, N.Y.-based research company, found that among girls aged 10 and younger, Barbie topped all other licensed and brand sales in that demographic group last year.

Parents can help their young girls—aged four through six—develop letter- and number-writing skills with the B-School Writing Tablet (\$49.99; barbie.everythinggirl.com). This Barbie-themed, portable learning aid, which in a girlish way mimics a tablet PC, also helps kids recognize shapes and lets them play educational games filled with music and animation. Although parents will appreciate that the tablet helps their girls learn, girls will think it's a fun way to play with Barbie.

The Barbie B-Book Learning Laptop (\$59.99) helps primary school-aged girls build their vocabulary, math, logic, and music skills while playing with this stylish toy and pretending to be just like mom working on *her* notebook. Girls can play 50 games and activities in English and 10 more in Spanish.

Handheld educational toys are a good choice and they're portable. We like the Quiz Biz Word Play and Math Mania devices from VTech (\$14.99 each; www.vtechkids.com). Quiz Biz toys, intended for kids aged five and older, help develop basic and problem-solving skills through 15 games. The toys have a wrist band to make them easier to carry. Kids can adjust the volume, and there's an automatic shut-off switch to conserve battery life.

Educational gaming systems use the screen from the TV instead of the monitor from a PC, but the gaming systems don't actually involve anything that is broadcast on the TV. Two systems from VTech caught our attention. The Nitro Vision station (\$59.99) is designed for kids aged six to nine. The console comes with four cartridges, and each cartridge features 80 activities that drill kids in subjects such as geography, the solar system, history, literature, and math. Kids use a wireless keyboard to input their answers.

The V.Flash Home Edutainment System (\$99.99) is a video game console geared toward 6- to 10-year-old kids; it also plugs directly into the TV. Older grade-schoolers will enjoy the 3-D graphics, and you'll like knowing that the Knowledge World playing mode is a virtual encyclopedia that can pump loads of facts into your kids' receptive craniums as they play. In Creative Workshop mode, they can create animations and puzzles.

Games and activities are stored on V.Discs. The Jumping Bean Island V.Disc comes with the system, and six other V.Discs are available for \$29.99 each.

Don't forget to encourage music education for your 4- to 8-year-old kids. The Fisher-Price I Can Play Piano system (\$79.99; www.fisher-price.com) includes one song and game cartridge and a color-coded, three-octave keyboard that plugs into a TV. Kids can choose to play

Top 5 Products For Elementary-Aged Kids

COSMEO

www.cosmeo.com
\$9.95 per month



Kids will enjoy going to this Web site, filled with in-depth, age-appropriate content on a variety of subjects.

netTrekker

www.nettrekker.com
\$9.95 per month

Parents can rest assured that their kids won't see anything inappropriate as they search online, using this teacher-approved search engine.



Nitro Vision

www.vtechkids.com
\$59.99



Young kids will think they're playing video games, but they'll be learning about many subjects through these fun activities.

I Can Play Piano

www.fisher-price.com • \$79.99



This gets high marks for its creative approach to getting kids interested in music.

Dell Latitude D520

www.dell.com • \$948 and up

The good features of this entry-level notebook will grow with your students on into middle school and high school.



A Few Guidelines

As parents, we're grateful for new products that help our kids learn in creative ways. Still, nothing can replace the need to learn the fundamentals—reading, writing, and arithmetic—and those subjects require basic supplies: books, paper, and pencils.

So how do you strike the right balance between textbooks and high tech? Here are a few guidelines.

1

Talk to your child's teacher. She can tell you which educational software, games, and

CE she uses in the classroom and steer you to items to use at home that will best supplement classroom instruction.

2

Set time limits. As the parent, you must control the use of electronics in your home. Screen time, no matter how educational it is, is still screen time. Set limits for how many sessions per week your child is allowed to use these educational devices and then determine the length of those sessions.

3

Read with your kids every day. The cherished time you have to sit with your children

and delve into a good book is fleeting. The RIF Web site (Reading Is Fundamental; www.rif.org) says that setting aside even 10 to 15 minutes each day for family reading time will help your children become lifelong readers.

in one of four modes, which build on one another to teach kids how to read music and play the right notes. By the fourth mode, your budding Beethoven is reading notes on real music staffs.

Notebook Computers

A fully functioning notebook is a big leap from educational toys and pretend laptops, but don't underestimate how helpful one can be for your elementary students. You can find a quality, entry-level notebook—one that will grow with your kids into high school—for a reasonable price.

For students, we like the Dell Latitude D520 (\$948 and up; www.dell.com) and the HP Presario V3000Z (\$799.99 and up; www.hp.com), customizable notebooks that come with Windows XP Home or Pro and can support the upcoming Windows Vista.

The Latitude D520 has an Intel Core Duo or Celeron M Processor, a 14.1-inch or 15-inch display, a 40GB (expandable up to 100GB) hard drive, a minimum 512MB of system memory, wireless connectivity, and four USB ports.

You'll find similar features on the Presario V3000Z, with the biggest difference being the processor: The base version of the V3000Z comes with the Mobile AMD Sempron 3200+. The 14.1-inch screen is ready for HD content, and the system has Microsoft Works and Money installed.

A Little Online Help

Whether your kids use their own notebooks or the family computer to do their homework, it's your responsibility to steer them to the right places online for help. Personal experience tells us

that teachers ask students as young as second grade to conduct online research as part of their homework, so safe, student-friendly Web sites are a must, but, as every parent knows, queries conducted in mainstream search engines can yield links we don't want our children to click.

You can rest assured your kids won't come across those links while using netTrekker (\$9.95 per month, \$99.95 per year; www.nettrekker.com), a search engine designed for students and used in thousands of schools in the United States.



Search results are culled from 180,000 academically oriented Web sites that are evaluated by a volunteer team of teachers. Because the entire search field of netTrekker is more defined than traditional search engines, search results won't include thousands of irrelevant links.

For a more interactive online experience, let your kids try the COSMEO Web site (\$9.95 per month, \$99 per year; www.cosmeo.com), which offers a free 30-day trial. Run by the Discovery Channel, this site offers students 30,000 educational videos, more than 15,000 interactive quizzes, 200

shelf Watch

HP Photosmart A716

\$249.99 • www.hp.com

What better way to help your daughter with her summer vacation photo collage than HP's Photosmart A716? A compact photo printer that doesn't require a PC to produce prints that should rival many in-store kiosks, the A716 has a built-in 4GB hard drive to store photos, and you can crop, zoom, and make other adjustments with it. You can print wirelessly, producing dramatic prints at up to 4,800 x 1,200 dpi with HP's Premium Plus Photo Paper.



Brain Games, 20,000 high-resolution photos, and an expanding encyclopedia of more than 27,000 articles. You'll find content in categories according to grades (K to 2, 3 to 5, 6 to 8, and 9 to 12), and students can save pages to their favorites. Each subscription comes with four student accounts and one parent account.

Grow-With-Me Products

Before you buy educational CE devices, you may want to check with your child's teacher about which items she thinks might best supplement education in the home. (See "A Few Guidelines.") If you do, research whether the product has "grow-with-me" potential. For instance, does the product use software appropriate for different age levels?

Or, if your oldest child is just starting school, look for quality products he can pass down to younger children.

Either way, you'll have a head start when that school supply checklist arrives in the mail. FG

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

Back To School: Middle Schoolers

Gadgets That Bridge The Intermediate Years

Toshiba Gigabeat S
\$299.99 • www.toshibadirect.com



Y our tween's back-to-school list is undoubtedly pretty long, including new clothes, shoes, and school supplies, before you even consider the electronic devices she's likely to want. And what exactly will your 10-to 14-year-old middle schooler want or need for back-to-school? We've compiled a few CE devices that may be on your tween's back-to-school list.

It All Adds Up

Middle schoolers taking pre-Algebra and Geometry are usually encouraged to use a calculator. If the school doesn't provide one, look to Casio (www.casio.com) or Texas Instruments (education.ti.com) for inexpensive models. The Texas Instruments TI-34 II Explorer Plus (\$24.99) is a scientific calculator that handles fractions. The Casio FX-55BU (\$19.95) also handles fractions and displays the numerator over the denominator, as kids see fractions displayed in their textbooks.

Machines For Homework

Your tween probably doesn't need her own computer, but she should have supervised time on the family's home computer. Desktop replacement laptops let your kids set up at the kitchen table and ask for homework assistance while dinner's being prepared, and when after-dinner chores have been completed, the whole family can take the laptop to the family room and play games online.

Toshiba's impressive Qosmio G35-AV600 (\$2,399.99; www.toshibadirect.com)

sports a 17.1-inch screen, so you and your daughter can both see the screen as she does online research. When she's finished, she and her friends can relax and watch DVDs or television or play games. Even in a gaming family, it'll take a while to fill up the G35-AV600's two 80GB hard drives.

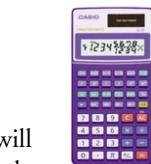
Many kids work on Apple computers at school, so they won't have any trouble adjusting to a MacBook Pro (\$2,799; store.apple.com) at home. The 17-inch display is perfect for working on group school projects, and the built-in iSight Web camera makes it a little easier for your younger kids to see and speak to their older siblings who are away at college.

Top 5 Products For Middle Schoolers

We had no trouble coming up with a list of products for tweens, but narrowing it to five was a bit of a problem.

Casio FX-55BU
\$19.95
www.casio.com

Middle-school girls will appreciate that this purple calculator stands out from the rest of the black-and-silver-calculator crowd.



Toshiba Qosmio G35-AV600
\$2,399.99
www.toshiba-direct.com

This powerful laptop is perfect for families who work and play hard.



Cell Phone Charms
\$3.99 to \$5.99
www.italiangoldcharms.com

If your tween has a favorite college volleyball or football team, click the

Homework Savers

Perhaps your son didn't finish the book report he was writing on a computer at school or your daughter doesn't want her science research paper to crumple in her backpack. Portable flash drives transport digital documents to and from school.

We're fond of the 256MB Imation Flash Wristband (\$34.99; www.imation.com) drive. You have eight colors from which to choose, but it's a one-size-fits-all, rugged rubber bracelet. If it's too big for your middle schooler's wrist, she can snap it on her backpack or purse instead.

Although it's tempting to indulge your middle schooler with a character-themed,

whimsical flash drive, keep in mind it'll probably spend a lot of time traveling in the pocket of a backpack, and kids' backpacks take quite a beating. Buy a sturdy drive, such as the Memorex Travel Drive (512MB \$59.99; www.memorex.com), housed in a protective case.

Keep In Touch

According to Marian Wilde of GreatSchools.net, a nonprofit organization that believes children and schools thrive

A Few Guidelines

Kids need limits; parents need to provide them.

1 If you don't want your daughter surfing the 'Net or text messaging her friends in classes, get a cell phone plan that doesn't support those features.

2 Saving \$60 per month from your son's 10th birthday to his 16th, for instance, will amass \$4,320 (not including interest) that you can put toward his college education. He may not need a cell phone until he's driving.

3 Don't hesitate to limit the time your kids spend on the computer or the content they view online. According to National PTA (www.pta.org) studies, good readers perform better than their peers in school. Make regular trips to the library or local bookstore and set aside time for the family to read together.

on active parental involvement, cell phone companies are heavily targeting the 6- to 12-year-old crowd. You'll find plenty of phones and plans designed specifically for children.

For instance, from Cricket (www.letstalk.com), you can get the T-Mobile Total Internet plan that includes real-time email access, Internet access, and 200 inbound/outbound text messages per month (additional messages are 5 cents per message); however, calls are a rather pricy 20 cents per minute, and the plan does not include the cost of a phone.

The T-Mobile Kid Connect 50 (\$19.99 per month) includes unlimited calling between children and their parents, 50 anytime cellular minutes, unlimited night and weekend minutes, unlimited mobile-to-mobile minutes, free long distance on the T-Mobile network, and additional features, such as caller ID, voicemail, and call waiting. The plan doesn't include text messaging or Internet access or a phone, and so as not to take advantage of kids who may not keep track of the minutes they've used, the phone shuts off after the 50 minutes are up, but kids can still complete calls to their parents' phone numbers and 911.

Firefly Mobile phone (\$99.99; www.fireflymobile.com) gives you some control over who your children talk to. You can program 20 numbers into speed dial and protect the phone book with a PIN so your kids can't change numbers without your permission. You can also engage a feature that rejects calls that come from numbers that aren't in your child's phone book. The wireless service for Firefly phones is available through service providers, such as Cingular, so check the Web site for providers in your area.

Most cell phone service providers offer family plans, too, so

be sure you check with your service provider to see what it has available.

Musical Escape

Although MP3 players topped most tweens' lists last holiday season, according to the CEA (Consumer Electronics Association) it's a recreational device as opposed to a school need. Still, if your daughter has a long bus ride to school or you'd like to reward her consistently good academic performance, she'd probably appreciate having her own digital music player.

The 30GB Toshiba Gigabeat S (\$299.99; www.toshibadirect.com) is a full-featured, hard-drive-based player that stores audio and photo files and plays video clips and recorded TV shows via TiVoToGo in addition to MP3, WMA, and uncompressed WAV music files. Use the 30 presets to listen to FM radio or connect the Gigabeat S to the Xbox 360 console and listen to the music while playing games.

For a more economical device, the flash-based iPod shuffle (512MB \$69; 1GB \$99; www.apple.com) plays random mixes of

shelf Watch

Pentax K10D

\$599 • www.pentaximaging.com



It's clear now that your eighth-grade niece's distaste for math and science means she probably won't be the next Marie Curie, but her innate ability to shoot the perfect picture suggests you should encourage her artistic side. Pentax's K10D is an entry-level D-SLR camera that should help her on her way to being the next Julia Margaret Cameron. It includes Pentax's smc 18-55mm lens and is compatible with all K-mount lenses. If offers an 11-point auto focus system and takes precision 6.1MP pictures.

the music you put on it. The USB connection makes it easy to load the music, too; just plug the shuffle into a USB port on your Mac or PC.

Make Their Own Music

To encourage your musically inclined kids who may not have access to a piano outside of school, Casio's standard CTK-800 (\$179.99) is a full-sized keyboard with tons of extras, including a metronome, 500 preset tones and user tones, 120 rhythms, and a mic terminal so your kids can sing along with any of the 100 tunes. It runs on six D batteries, or you can buy an optional AD-5 AC Adapter (\$19.95).

Shop Around

There are loads of products on the market targeting tweens, but consider your child's age and tastes before you buy. As a 10-year-old, your daughter may like a device festooned with the image of her favorite doll, but a short year later, she may be too embarrassed to be seen with a pink plastic cell phone or digital music player. And always compare the branded device to others on the market to make sure you're not paying extra simply for the image. **FG**



Imation Flash Wristband

\$34.99

www.imation.com

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

Back To School: High Schoolers

Gear For Grads-To-Be



The North Face Pandora (left) & Isabella (right)
\$39/\$65 • www.thenorthface.com

Like Jan. 1, each new school year holds the promise of a fresh start. But whereas New Year's Day is all about resolutions, the new school year is more about getting equipped for the next nine months. Times change, though. Pens and spiral-bound notebooks still have their place in the halls of primary education, but now they co-exist alongside laser printers and notebook computers.

What's useful to 14- to 18-year-olds as they return to class and extracurricular activities? We can think of a few things.

Computing On The Run

For the student who's writing papers, researching topics, manipulating graphics, and juggling a social life, no single tool will come in handier than a computer. Laptops are starting to outsell desktops because of their convenient portability, and that fits right into the semi-nomadic existence of a student.

Dell (www.dell.com) and HP (www.hp.com) continue to be favorites for new computer shoppers. For Windows users, the HP dv2000t notebook PC (\$1,099.99), for instance, will do pretty much anything a desktop model can except give you a hernia taking it to the library.

Apple's (www.apple.com) recent switch to Intel processors means it's a whole new ball game and not just for veteran Mac users. Apple's MacBooks (\$1,099 and up) and MacBook Pros (\$1,999 and up) can run both Windows and the Mac

OS—even simultaneously—using Parallels Desktop for Mac (\$79.99; www.parallels.com).

Safety Net

There's one lesson computer users seem to need to learn the hard way: If your data isn't backed up, it doesn't exist. That term paper that's taken 100 hours to research and write? All it needs to vanish forever is one serious computer crash.



Symantec Norton Ghost
\$69.99 • www.symantec.com

High school isn't too soon to learn the importance of backing up data. If students develop good backup habits now,

this will serve them well in the higher-stake worlds of college and career.

We stockpile so much data it often requires another hard drive. For flexibility and simplicity, we recommend an external drive USB 2.0 or FireWire drive. Seagate (www.seagate.com) and Western Digital (www.westerndigital.com) drives are popular and reliable. Western Digital's My Book Pro (\$349.99) is a 500 GB drive with USB 2.0/FireWire 400/FireWire 800 interfaces.

Top 5 Products For High Schoolers

If we were headed off to class, these would make us happy campers indeed.



Apple MacBook
\$1,099 for 13.3-inch white model
www.apple.com

It isn't just that Macs are almost entirely free of viruses, it's also that Apple has now switched to Intel processors, and Macs are some of the most flexible computers around, meaning no program left behind.

Seagate USB 2.0 Portable Hard Drive
\$199 for 120GB model
www.seagate.com



Seagate has a well-deserved reputation for reliability, and that's what you want in a backup drive. Seagate's portables draw their power directly from the computer's USB 2.0 connection and thus don't require a separate power source.

Panasonic SC-PM71SD Micro System Stereo
\$399.95 • www.panasonic.com

This system may be compact in size, but it's big in sound quality and

features, including its separate portable digital audio player. And because it's not a space hog, this micro system will make a good transition to the dorm room.



Canon PowerShot A430 4MP Digital Camera

\$179.99 • www.canonusa.com

This 4MP camera is compact enough to go anywhere, which makes it easy to snap high-quality shots of anything from a science project to an extracurricular day at the beach. Plus, its entry-level price shouldn't inspire much worry on the more perilous outings.



The North Face Modem Backpack
\$49 • www.thenorthface.com

You can't go wrong with any North Face bag, but this one is specifically designed for campus life. The main compartment has a sleeve for notebook computers, and there's also a headphone port for music players.



Drives sometimes come with basic software for automating backups, but if yours doesn't, or you want a program with more features, check out Symantec's Norton Ghost 10 (\$69.99 for Windows; www.symantec.com) or Prosoft Engineering's Data Backup (\$59 for Mac; www.prosofteng.com).

The Sound Of 2006-7

Every high school year has its soundtrack, and the more places to play it, the better. Of course, the iPod (\$69 for 512MB iPod shuffle, and up; www.apple.com) is still the reigning choice for portability.

Sometimes it's good to kick it behind closed doors with a system of your own, too, or find background accompaniment to stimulate the brain while studying. Panasonic (www.panasonic.com) and Denon (www.denon.com) are makers of compact systems, such as Denon's D-M33S CD/ AM/FM Micro System (\$499), that should fit in any room.

Image Consciousness

Whether it's shooting pictures for a class project or preserving a moment among friends, a digital camera sees a lot of use during high school. Most kids won't need more than a compact point-and-shoot, such as Nikon's Coolpix L4 (\$149.99; www.nikon.com).

Bag It To Go

Your son's backpack is his mobile locker, holding textbooks, notebooks, a computer, cell phone, and the 101 other things he can't live without. The key is durability. A lot of brands look good, but they may start coming apart after a few months of use.

We're fans of the rugged, good-looking bags and packs from Timbuk2 (www.timbuk2.com). And The North Face (www.thenorthface.com) has been making mountaineering-tough gear for nearly 40 years that will serve well at lower altitudes, too. In addition to unisex daypacks, The North Face has packs specifically contoured for women, including the Pandora (\$39).

and the Isabella (\$65), as well as shoulder bags, such as the Calyx (\$45), which features an internal mesh cell phone pocket. For totting notebook computers, check out the Sepal (\$69) and Bandwidth (\$65).

As The Bell Rings

You know what your children need and want, and now you've seen some of the gear that can do the job. Add some motivation, and this can be the most productive school year yet. **FG**

BY BRIAN HODGE

Shelf Watch

Toshiba Satellite P105-S9312

\$1,999.99 • www.toshiba.com

The P105-S9312 is a terrific laptop that should help high school seniors prepare for AP tests and final papers. With a 2GHz Intel Core Duo CPU, 200GB hard drive, and 2GB DDR2 RAM, the P105-S9312 makes a great early graduation gift, too. Its 17-inch display has a 1,440 x 900 native resolution, which is wide enough to open several program windows at once. With integrated 802.11a/b/g connectivity, the P105-S9312 is ready for late-night study sessions at Starbucks.



A Few Guidelines

1

Kids are developing consumer electronics expertise at increasingly early ages—savvy at seven and old pros by high school. That hardly means you should leave high schoolers to their own devices, however, without any supervision whatsoever.

2

Adolescents can be tough on things. New gadgets will be put out of commission with not-so-tender loving care; remind your son that if he breaks it, it's his responsibility to replace it.

3

Teenagers often fail to consider bills coming due weeks later. If you give your teen a cell phone, consider starting her off on a prepaid calling plan to avoid astronomical overage charges.

4

A high schooler may have legitimate uses for a camcorder—say, multimedia assignments or filming sports practice, but we've seen too many "Jackass"-type stunts gone wrong to feel comfortable handing over a camcorder, especially to a teenage guy, without knowing exactly how he intends to use it.

5

The biggest potential for trouble, however, is unsupervised Internet use. Studies routinely reveal that roughly half of parents have little or

no idea what their kids are doing online. A few tips to keep things under control:

- Set firm guidelines concerning your high schooler's online activities: when, how long, what content is off-limits, whom she can chat with, etc.
- Consider restricting Internet use to a computer installed in an open area in the home, with plenty of traffic, rather than in a private room.
- Stress the dangers of posting personal information to public areas or sharing it with strangers who could turn out to be online predators.
- Make sure your child can feel comfortable coming to you if someone or something has left them feeling threatened or targeted.
- If you suspect your child is breaking the rules, you may want to resort to using Spector (\$99.95; www.spec-torsoft.com) or some other Internet surveillance program to see what's really going on.



Back To School: College Kids

Perfect Gifts For The Grad In Your Life

Casio EXILIM Zoom EX-Z1000
\$399.99 • www.casio.com



Back in the day, when students headed off to college, the most high-tech devices they needed were calculators and Hi-Fi stereos. These days, in order to be prepared, students must navigate more complicated CE waters. Whether you're shopping for your niece, your sister, your daughter, or yourself, we offer some sound advice to help you choose the best equipment for your budget and your needs.

It's Academic

Over the past few years, laptop computers have become not only commonplace, but required equipment at many colleges. Policies vary from state to state and from institution to institution. For instance, the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education requires all students at public institutions of higher education in the state to own and use laptops, and Wake Forest University in North Carolina provides laptops and wired and/or wireless high-speed Internet access (in all dorms and classrooms) to all of its undergraduate students. A laptop requirement is especially common in graduate programs, particularly teacher-training (where Macs are traditionally required), law and business schools, and medical and nursing programs.

Before you buy a new computer, do your homework. First, check to see what the college or university suggests or requires. Next, take the time to assess the real needs of the student who will be using the computer. If she will primarily use her laptop for conducting research,

writing papers, emailing friends and family, and downloading music, then she doesn't need to invest in a powerful multimedia system. Be sure to consider her lifestyle, as well. Is she living off-campus or in a dorm that is a long walk

from her classes? If so, an ultraportable system will make her life much more comfortable. Last, but not least, think in the long-term. Invest in technologies—such as Wi-Fi, WiMax, BD (Blu-ray Disc), and Bluetooth—that may not yet be

standard, but will be commonplace by the time she graduates. And don't skimp on any elements that will enable her to perform functions or download information more quickly, such as processor speed and memory. (If your budget forces you to choose between the two, memory is generally the better investment, in terms of bang-for-your-buck.)

Top 5 Products For College Kids

High school graduation is a landmark in a young person's life. It's tough to know just what gift is the perfect choice for the graduate in your life, but we have a few ideas: Send her off to college with one these devices.

iPod nano

1GB, \$149; 2GB, \$199;
4GB, \$249
www.apple.com



Courtesy of Apple

The nano is cute and very popular. Its maximum capacity version (4GB), which holds roughly 1,000 songs, offers the best cost-per-gigabyte (\$62.25) of any of the iPods, giving you the most bang-for-your-buck. With its 1.5-inch color display, user-friendly click-wheel, and pencil-thin design, it's almost everything the more pricey iPod video is, only smaller. To really make her smile, pair this gift with an iTunes gift certificate (www.apple.com/itunes/give).

MacBook

Starting at \$1,099 • www.apple.com

Next to a shiny new car, a shiny, new ultraportable laptop is the ultimate graduation gift. For Mac users, we suggest the 13-inch MacBook, which features the Intel Core Duo chip and combines PC power with the gorgeous, easy-to-use form factor of a Mac—all for a price that's lower than many less-impressive competitors.



Courtesy of Apple

Sony Vaio TX series

Starting at \$2,299.99
www.sonystyle.com

For Windows users, our top pick is the Sony Vaio TX series. It weighs less than 3 pounds, comes in four colors, and has not only built-in Wi-Fi, but also built-in "SmartWi," which means (with a Cingular plan) you don't need a hotspot to access the Web.



Casauri Laptop Bags Everyday Tote

\$85 to \$90 • www.casauri.com

Of course, she'll need to transport her new laptop on campus, so a hip, but sturdy, laptop bag is a must. We love the new designs from Casauri, a New Jersey-based company run by two sisters who make laptop bags exclusively for women. The colors are bright, the designs are beautiful and practical, and the bags are made to withstand real-life bumps and spills.

Shure E Series Sound-Isolating Earphones

\$109 to \$549 • www.shure.com

Whether she uses them to listen to recorded lectures, language lessons, or to drown out her roommate's snoring, a set of high-end headphones should be standard issue for your grad. We recommend the Shure E Series Sound Isolating Earphones. These in-ear earphones are lightweight, almost completely block out background noise.



5 Gifts Under \$50

If you're looking for a great gift for your college student that won't break the bank, try one of these:

Turtle Beach Audio

Advantage Amigo

Inexpensive Internet phone calls; easy file transfer and storage
www.turtlebeach.com • \$49.95

Water-Powered Clock

So she'll never sleep through exams
www.thinkgeek.com • \$12.99

MicroSaver Notebook Lock

So her laptop can't be stolen
www.us.kensington.com • \$44.99

iTunes Gift Certificate

So she can fill her iPod for free
www.apple.com/itunes/give • \$15, \$25, \$50 increments

Belkin SurgeMaster HD

To protect all of her devices from power surges and spikes
www.belkin.com • \$29.99

run on the fast, new Intel Core Duo processor, come with up to 1GB RAM, and offer crisp, bright displays as well as a strong set of features. If portability is your priority, then the Sony Vaio TX series (starting at \$2,299.99; www.sonystyle.com) or the MacBook (starting at \$1,099) are top candidates. Both are powerful, pretty, and lightweight. The 11.1-inch Vaio TX series runs on the Intel Pentium M processor (a high-performance laptop chip), comes in four colors, weighs less than 3 pounds, and has Wi-Fi built-in. The 13-inch MacBook is built on the speedy Core Duo chip, comes in two colors, weighs just over 5 pounds, and offers up to 2GB of RAM. If it's a multimedia powerhouse you're looking for—good for film, graphic design, or art students—then the Sony Vaio AR series (starting at \$1,600) is an excellent choice. Its built-in BD technology and HD resolution 17-inch screen combined with a suite of video-editing software, a Core Duo chip, and up to 2GB RAM, make editing and burning HD video possible. Released in June, the AR series laptops are the first on the market to be able to read, write, and re-write BD media. They also have a television tuner, built-in Web camera for video messaging,

and integrated Wi-Fi and Bluetooth.

Phoning Home

If the thought of shipping your child off to school on the other side of the country—or even the other end of the state—feels like a big step, providing her with some easy ways to keep in touch can ease the transition for both of you. Giving her a cell phone or smartphone means that, in theory, you'll always be able to reach her. If you want to see, as well as hear her, buy a couple of Web cams, such as the Logitech QuickCam for Notebooks Pro (\$99.99; www.logitech.com).

To help ease the transition from home to dorm, a pair of Ceiva 3 Digital Photo Receiver (\$129.95 each, includes three months of service; www.ceiva.com) and Ceiva Picture Plan (\$6.95 per month) can supply her with new photos from home every day. All you need is a landline and a power supply for each receiver (yours and hers), and you can send photos to her every night, if you like.



Ceiva 3 Digital Photo Receiver • \$129.95 • www.ceiva.com

shelf Watch

Sony KDS-55A2000
\$3,299.99 • www.sonystyle.com

Send your son to college in style with Sony's KDS-55A2000, a 55-inch SXRD (Silicon X-tal Reflective Display) TV. He'll be the talk of the quad when he invites his entire floor to crowd the room for football Sundays in HD or catch the latest episode of "Entourage." It's capable of 1080p, so he'll already be equipped for PlayStation 3 study breaks when the game console arrives later this year.



Entertainment Value

Once you've taken care of the essentials, if your budget permits, a few celebratory purchases may be in order. The Sony MFM-HT205 20-inch Flat Panel LCD PC/TV (\$899.99), for instance, is both an HDTV and a flat-panel LCD. She can watch DVDs or cable television on it, as well as do her work on a monitor that's easy on the eyes. An MP3 player with video, such as the Toshiba Gigabeat S (30GB is \$299; 60GB is \$399) or the iPod video (30GB is \$299; 60GB is \$399; www.apple.com), makes an excellent treat, and she can even use it for practical things, like storing files. And last but not least, a new digicam, to help her record her college days, is a great gift idea. We recommend the Kodak EasyShare C360 (\$249.95; www.kodak.com) or the Casio EXILIM Zoom EX-Z1000 (\$399.99; www.casiousa.com).

Some things may have changed since the days of Hi-Fi stereos and calculators, but the enormity of the transition from home to college—and the amount of stuff you'll have to help her carry up to her room—have not. With some good planning and smart CE shopping, you can help the graduate in your life feel at home away from home and excel in her coursework. **FG**

BY NAOMI GRAYCHASE

Editor's Top 5

Coolest Devices For Going Back To School

For every child, going back to school has its ups and downs: A new school year is exciting and challenging, but there are no more lazy summer afternoons at the pool anymore, either. Send your kids back to school in style with the CE devices—some serious, some a little frivolous—that *First Glimpse* editor Katie Sommer thinks will have them dancing all the way to the bus stop.

1

iPod shuffle (512MB \$69; 1GB \$99; www.apple.com).

An iPod? For going back to school? It's not as crazy as it sounds. Apple's MP3 player can double as a portable storage device for older children, so they can improve their study skills by working on term papers at home, at school, or at a friend's house. And speaking of studying, help your child create a folder of classical music on her shuffle to listen to while she memorizes her Latin declensions—the soothing music is excellent for information retention.



2

Mobile Edge Paris Backpack (\$99.99; www.mobileedge.com).

Anyone who remembers trying to walk all the way across campus in the 10 minutes between classes knows that a comfortable, secure way to carry everything is crucial for college kids. Mobile Edge's Paris backpack gives your new college student a way to carry her laptop and books in a bag small enough to fit under her desk chair. I especially like the ergonomic back straps and padded back panel, which will ensure no sore shoulders at the end of a long day of classes and studying.

hard drive has enough room for term projects and research papers galore, and the HD DVD-ROM will let you reward your child for her hard work with a cool high-definition movie of her choice. The Qosmio's Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity will minimize the cords and wires, as well, so your son will have a neat and tidy area in which to research and write.

3

Toshiba Qosmio G35-AV650 (\$2,999.99; www.toshiba.com).

This "crème de la crème" laptop can help every member of your family. The 200GB

4

iHome iH5 (\$99.99; www.ihomeaudio.com).

Gone are the days of sleeping in until 10 o'clock in the morning; getting back into the early-morning routine can be tough on kids. The iHome iH5 is a clock radio that, when you dock your iPod on it, will wake up your child with something more soothing than an obnoxious DJ's voice. After a few weeks, when school morning routines are established, you can move it into your own bedroom instead (why let kids have all the fun?).

5

Lexar JumpDrive Expression (256MB \$29.99; 512MB \$44.99; 1GB \$69.99; www.lexar.com).

If you've purchased a new laptop or desktop computer in the last year or so, you most likely don't have a floppy disk drive; they're all but obsolete. The computers at your child's school might likewise be floppy drive-less, but they still need a way to carry copies of their research papers back and forth from school to home, and they might not be old enough to use an iPod or similar portable storage device. The Lexar JumpDrive Expression USB flash drive comes with a colorful rubber shell that protects it from the bumps and bashes that are inevitable in the schoolyard. Though the drive is offered in 256MB, 512MB, and 1GB sizes, the 256MB version will be plenty for your child, and at \$29.99, you'll only cringe a little if she accidentally loses it. **FG**

Lifestyle Close-Up Tips

Keep It In One Piece

1

Make it age-appropriate.

This is the no-brainer tip, but from what we've seen, it apparently isn't common sense to every parent: Don't give a child a device if they're not ready for it. If your son's goldfish or hamsters gradually became your responsibility, guess who will soon be keeping his new laptop current with security updates. As for an older child, she'll be much more likely to take care of a scratch-prone iPod if she had to earn at least part of it herself.

2

Teach them the way.

Before you let your son or daughter have a new CE device, read the users manual. Pay special attention to the "do not" section that lists warnings such as, "Do not remove the memory card while the phone is on." Go through the dos and don'ts with your child, and let him know that if he breaks the game console or music player by not following the rules, he won't get another one anytime soon.

3

Suit it up.

There are numerous protective cases and skins on the

market for virtually any mobile device—and for good reason. Look for a padded case or silicon skin that won't prevent your daughter from accessing the device's controls, or she'll just remove it. Also, if your child plans to tote his Xbox 360 over to a

friend's house, or run around with any other not-so-mobile device with a large price tag, help him pack it in a padded box or pack for safekeeping. Xbox-friendly packs include the Lasr GamePak (\$39.99; www.lasraccessories.com) and the Naki World G-Pak 360 Carrying Case (about \$30; www.naki-world.com).

4

Unseen perils.

Most kids know that if they spill a soda or glass of juice on something electronic, they can pretty much kiss that gizmo goodbye. But what about the other hazards

that, to a child, are just good, clean fun? For instance, every kid loves to rub a balloon on her head or shuffle her feet on the rug to generate static electricity, but she probably doesn't realize that static can kill many CE devices dead. Those science-kit magnets or audio speakers can erase a game console's or cell phone's hard drive if they're strong enough and close enough to the device, and a dead battery can leak corrosive acid if left in a device or toy for a few months. Finally, set parameters for use and let your child know the consequences: Teachers and principals have been known to confiscate gadgets used by students at inappropriate times.

5

Accidents will happen.

You can be as vigilant as you like, but remember one thing: kids are kids. All it takes is a moment of forgetfulness, and that iPod nano will be lying cracked on the sidewalk or going home with the bus driver. Unless your youngster is chronic in this regard, it's best to forgive and forget. Remember how you handled your belongings when you were her age and the lessons you learned from losing them. Besides, there's probably an updated model available with all sorts of new features you can explore together. **FG**



BY MARTY SEMS

Digital Studio Shopping Tips

Touch It Up With Photo-Editing Software

BY MARTY SEMS

If the photo-editing software that came with your camera or computer doesn't cut it, take a look around. There's an app out there for you—and it might not cost a dime. Cut this page out and use it on your next shopping trip.

It seems like every app can eliminate redeye, make photos look old-fashioned with sepia tones, and convert photos from one file format to another, but you may want more. A healing or cloning feature lets you remove scratches, blemishes, or even entire ex-boyfriends by blending in pieces copied from other parts of a photo. Other programs offer one-click printing in common print sizes, such as 3 x 5 or 4 x 6, without first making you resize a photograph yourself. Most let you easily burn photo slideshows to CD or DVD, publish pics to sharing services on the Web, and email snapshots to others.

Trial versions are available for several popular picks. Check out sites such as www.adobe.com/downloads and www.corel.com and see firsthand how easy some apps are to use. There are freeware and shareware options out there too, such as GIMP, the GNU Image Manipulation Program. It's a free download at www.gimp.org.

First Glimpse's Web site lets subscribers search for reviews of photo-editing software on our sister publications *Smart Computing* and *PC Today*'s Web sites, too. User reviews on Amazon.com can also be very helpful, although some reviewers clearly have agendas for or against certain software, so take them with grains of salt.

Editing photos can be a blast. If your camera adds ten pounds, take them back off with the Thinify feature in Corel Photo Album 6 Deluxe (\$49.99; www.corel.com). Some editing software lets you print greeting cards or scrapbook pages; Adobe Photoshop Elements (\$99.99; www.adobe.com) even lets you order bound and printed editions. If you have a Mac and want to turn your photos into comic book pages with text balloons, try Comic Life 1.2 (\$24.95; plasq.com). One secret weapon to unleash on bored 'tweens on a rainy day is a program that warps people's eyeballs and mouths in funny ways, such as Zeallsoft's Fun Morph (\$39.95; www.funmorph.com).

If digital photography is more than a hobby to you, you may need more advanced tools, such as layers, in your editing software. Layers let you apply effects or changes to a photo one on top of the other, and then alter or remove any of your changes at any time. To preserve the highest detail levels, some shutterbugs look for RAW support. RAW is a general term for photo files that the camera doesn't compress. However, one camera manufacturer's RAW format may differ from another's, so support varies.

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

□ Which operating systems does the software support?

- Windows XP/2000
- Windows 98/Me
- Windows Vista
- Mac OS X

□ What useful features does it have?

- red-eye reduction
- healing/cloning
- emailing/Web publishing
- easy printing of 4 x 6s, 5 x 7s, etc.
- layers
- comic effects

Which types of photo files does it support?

- JPEG
- TIF
- RAW

Notes



Part 2 Of 3

Become A Digital Camcorder Pro

Achieving Pro Results Begins With Pro Techniques

Last month we began a three-part look at tips and tricks that anybody with a digital camcorder can employ to improve the quality of his or her home video. We started with pure shooting techniques—the way you wield the camera and how to approach what you're doing.

We'll be covering shooting this month, too, but with the focus now on a couple of areas that many people don't give as much thought to as they should, or even at all: light and filters.

Lights, Camera, Forethought

If you've ever looked aghast at yourself in one mirror because it shows a much less flattering view than you saw earlier in another mirror, you've had all the crash-course you need in the effects of good and bad lighting.

Before you start shooting video, take a minute to analyze the scene's lighting, keeping in mind three basic principles:

Natural lighting usually keeps colors the most true-to-life, because sunlight is comprised of the full spectrum of visible light. Most indoor bulbs emit a narrower range, so they can give your footage a particular color cast that you may not want. Fluorescent light, for example, can result in pale, greenish skin tones that are particularly unappealing. Whatever the light source, be sure to set your camcorder's white balance control to match it.



RoadWired Photo/Video Convertible Bag
\$124.95 • www.roadwired.com

When light rays are diffused—that is, scattered and coming from several directions, as on a cloudy day—they illuminate your subject more evenly and pleasantly than light that is strongly directional.

If you're stuck with directional light, try to keep it to the side of your subject. Side lighting creates shadows that will give your subject more visual depth than front-on lighting, which will flatten its appearance.

Whatever you can do to correct a less-than-ideal situation, whether by moving outside or closer to a window or reorienting yourself relative to a fixed light source, will probably be worth the effort.

Know Your Camcorder

Most digital camcorders you pick up today are designed to handle a variety of lighting types (sunny day, cloudy day, incandescent bulbs, fluorescents, etc.), with an Auto or Easy setting that automatically adjusts the camera for whatever its meters are reading.

Still, it's a good idea to explore your camcorder's menu and get familiar with the lighting presets, so you can call them up as needed. This may prevent a shot from taking on odd or shifting color tones if you're shooting around multiple lighting types, such as a room lit by sun through a skylight overlapping with one or more artificial sources. Set your camcorder for the dominant source and then switch it if you change to a shooting angle in which another source becomes dominant.

Also be sure you know how to activate your camcorder's backlighting compensation feature. Backlighting occurs when your subject is located in front of a strong light source, such as a window in a dim room. Ordinarily, the camcorder will react to the strong background light, underexposing the shot and leaving you with a dark silhouette. By activating the backlighting

Our Top 5 Favorite Carry-Alls

If you're serious about video, you're going to be hefting around more than just a video camera. To safely transport your camcorder and accessories and keep everything organized, you need a good, sturdy bag.

Kodak Large Camera Bag (\$29.95; www.kodak.com). Bags don't care if they're carrying a still camera or a camcorder. Kodak's basic but sturdy bags appeal to bargain-hunters.

RoadWired Photo/Video Convertible Bag (\$124.95; www.roadwired.com). If you tire of dangling this one from your hand or shoulder, unfold the built-in belt and convert it to an adjustable waistpack.

Targus Madison Video Backpack (\$29.99; www.targus.com). You say you're more the backpack type? Strap this one on and be yourself.

Kata GDC Rucksack R-103 (\$275; www.kata.com). Another backpack, but a tougher one designed for wilderness excursions, complete with a reversible weather-protection cover.

Lowepro Omni Traveler + Traveler Extreme (\$207; www.lowepro.com). The ultimate in flexible protection: a softshell bag that fits into a hardshell case for those times when you need something extra rugged. ●

compensation, you can enhance your subject's visibility.

Throw Your Own Light

Sometimes a camcorder just can't cut it on its own. There won't be enough light, period, to get the shot you want. Or the available light is clearly unflattering. Or you're in a high-contrast setting where

powerful add-on that can attach to the accessory shoe, if your camcorder has one.

Check your camcorder manufacturer's Web site to see if it makes a video light specifically designed to work with your model. For instance, Canon's VL-10 Li Video Light (\$100; www.usa.canon.com), is compatible with a number of its video cameras.

Although they're simple to use, **lens filters** are one of the great overlooked tools among home video buffs.

bright lights and deep shadows exist side-by-side, and you want to brighten the darker patches.

In these situations, and others, having your own light ready can save the shot. Many camcorders have a built-in light you can switch on, but the effective range is often very short. A better option is a more

Don't Forget To Filter

Although they're simple to use, lens filters are one of the great overlooked tools among home video buffs. If you want to shoot like a pro, then the truth is, professionals usually shoot with some type of filter, and there are plenty available for consumer cams too.

Lighting Checklist

So you're not at the mercy of different (and difficult) lighting situations, here's a basic lighting kit that will give you more control.

- Attachable video light
- Polarizer filter
- Neutral density filter
- Diffusion filter
- White posterboard (to set up out-of-frame and bounce diffused light back onto your subject)



Filters are attached by screwing them onto the lens barrel, so it's crucial to make sure you have chosen the right size. Many compact camcorders have lens sockets around 30mm or so wide. If lens size isn't listed in your camcorder's manual or specifications, consult the manufacturer.

Again, consult your cam's manufacturer to see if it sells accessory filters that fit your model. Or visit Tiffen (www.tiffen.com), one of the leading makers of lens filters, to get a good idea of the different types of filters that exist, and their prices.

You, however, can probably get by with just a few lens filters. Here are some of the most useful.

Polarizer. If you add only one filter to your video bag, a polarizer should be it, especially if you do a lot of shooting outdoors. It's indispensable for reducing or eliminating glare or sheen reflecting off water, glass, and other shiny surfaces, to reveal the detail beneath. Polarizers also make the sky look a deeper, more vivid blue and improve overall color saturation.

For a Sony camcorder, the VF-30CPKXS 30mm Polarizing Filter Kit (\$69.99; www.sonystyle.com) is compatible with dozens of Handycams.

Neutral density filter. Neutral density filters reduce the amount of light entering a lens, which will improve contrast, clarity, and detail when you're shooting in a setting so bright that your footage may look washed out. The filters come in varying strengths; although different manufacturers use different numerical scales to indicate the filter's strength, the higher the number, the more light it cuts. The easiest translation to understand is how many f-stops the filter is equal to, just like on a still camera.

For a Canon camcorder, see if the Filter Set FS-34U (\$70; www.usa.canon.com), which includes a Neutral Density filter, will fit your model.

Diffusion filter. If you're shooting a close-up of someone, especially in strong light, a diffusion filter will

give her a more flattering appearance by minimizing lines and softening the image. At Tiffen, the filters run \$48.15 and up for 37mm sizes and larger.

Stay Focused

That's it for another month. Keep shooting and next time we'll cover what to do with your footage now that you have it. 

BY BRIAN HODGE

shelf Watch

Mustek DV536
\$199.99 • www.mustek.com

Whether it's filming your child's first play date or capturing the action of your husband's sport-fishing expedition, the Mustek DV536 is an affordable digital camcorder that slips into your purse for easy, comfortable transport. It uses a 5MP CMOS (complementary metal-oxide semiconductor) sensor to capture MPEG-4 video. Although it may not replace your high-end digicam or PVR, its 10MP digital camera and PVR capabilities make it a handy device if you can't take all of your gadgets with you.





Photography Technique Tip

Colorful & Sharp Close-ups

If the devil is in the details, when it comes to macro photography the details are devilish, indeed. Few types of photography seem so simple on the surface yet in reality are as complicated as macro shots. You may never set out to create a gallery of macro masterpieces, but by following a few basic tips you'll take much better pictures of your favorite minutia.

Most cameras made today come with a built-in Macro mode, which is denoted by a flower symbol. On many point-and-shoot cameras, Macro mode shifts your lens into a position that helps it

focus on objects you're close to. When you select the Macro setting, a lot of cameras change to a small aperture setting in order to increase depth of field, which boosts the chances that more objects in your picture will feature sharp focus. Maximizing depth of field is vital in macro photography because if your focus point is off by even a hair, blurriness will likely ruin the shot.

Focus is another critical component in making sharp close-ups. If you really want crisp images, forget macro shots unless you have a tripod handy. No matter how steady your hands, the aforementioned shallow depth of field inherent to macro photography will amplify even the slightest movement. For

this same reason you'll want to consider using your camera's self-timer capability to release the shutter.

Although you may love your camera's accurate autofocus for landscapes and portraits, in Macro mode you'll often find that autofocus frustrates you by locking onto the wrong parts of a teensy subject. Make sure you know how to use manual focus on your camera before you take on a massive macro shooting session, primarily because some camera models make this fundamental task a real chore.

Ambient light is your ally when you capture close-ups, because using your flash for macro shots is, at best, an iffy proposition. The flashbulb may often overwhelm subjects, in which case you may be able to use manual setting to reduce brightness; if you can't tone down the flash, try covering the flash bulb with a piece of thin white copy paper. Keep in mind that your flash may miss a subject altogether (or create a shadow on the subject) simply because your camera is too close.

If ambient light, such as a noon-time sun, creates harsh shadows on your subject, you don't have to settle. Hold a piece of poster board or even a thick piece of paper above the subject to diffuse or scatter the direct light beams. You'll see softer and more pleasant shadows that better accentuate your target.

Last, but far from least, remember that although macro photography's smaller scale may seem to simplify composition, it really doesn't. Think of your subjects as landscapes in miniature and put thought into every shot you take. Combined with the other tips we offered, you'll be making more powerful macro shots in no time. **FG**

BY NATHAN CHANDLER

Camera Phone Snaps

Where To Go From Here?

Hor better or worse, most of us are joined at the hip (or purse) to our cell phones. Now that most of our cell phones are equipped with cameras, we are rarely without the ability to capture an image. That's a good thing because it's not always possible—or convenient—to carry our digital camera with us everywhere we go. Yet most of us leave the pictures on the phone. Maybe we leave them there because it's not always easy to transfer the images from the phone to the computer or because the image quality doesn't measure up to digital camera pictures, so printing doesn't seem to be a viable option.

Perhaps the easiest and most cost-efficient method for getting pictures from your phone to your computer is via removable media. The Nokia N90 (\$399.99 to \$599.99; www.nokia.com), is well-equipped for taking pictures and uses an MMC card (\$69.95 for 128MB Nokia card). Just put the card into a compatible reader such as the SanDisk Mobile-Mate SD Plus 5-in-1 Reader (\$19.99; www.sandisk.com).

Nokia N90
\$399.99 to \$599.99 • www.nokia.com

SanDisk Mobile Mate SD Plus 5-in-1 Reader
\$19.99 • www.sandisk.com



If your phone doesn't support removable media, you may be able to use a USB cable to move images from your phone. If your camera phone has a USB connection, however, it may not come with a cable or software, so you'll have to buy them separately (a connectivity cable and software for the Nokia N90 costs \$49.95).

If both your phone and your computer support Bluetooth, you can beam your photos wirelessly. Even if your computer doesn't support the technology, you can buy a Bluetooth adapter such as Belkin's Bluetooth USB Adapter (\$49.99; www.belkin.com), which plugs into your PC or Mac's USB port. Some photo kiosks, such as the Kodak PictureMaker, are Bluetooth enabled, so you can print directly from a camera phone, such as the Motorola PEBL (\$299.99; www.motorola.com), which comes in four colors.

If your cell phone doesn't support Bluetooth, USB, or removable media, you can always email your images to yourself or to an online site such as the Kodak Gallery (www.kodakgallery.com). Check with your mobile carrier about pricing for multimedia messaging (sending images via email).

About Those Prints

As with any digital photography, there are several elements that affect whether you can get a good print, but the most important one is megapixel count. Although consumer digital cameras now come with plenty of megapixels for high quality pictures, most camera phones lag behind, with their low resolution (usually 1.3MP or less), which affects your printing options.

As with any digital photography, there are several elements that affect whether you can get a good print, but the most important one is megapixel count.

Camera Phone Picture-Taking Tips

- Make it more than a quick snapshot by employing standard photography behavior such as holding the camera still, composing carefully, avoiding distracting backgrounds, etc.
- Use the highest resolution your phone makes possible.
- Choose lighting conditions wisely; bring your subject out of the shadows and into the light.
- Don't use the digital zoom; instead, move a bit closer to your subject.
- Hold the camera phone steady.
- Use noise reduction software such as Imagenomic's Noiseware (from \$26; www.imagenomic.com) to eliminate the ugly grain that often accompanies camera-phone pictures.

Until recently, most camera phones captured pictures at VGA resolution (640 x 480 pixels), which isn't good for much of anything other than emailing, posting online, or printing small stickers. Although camera phones in the United States are still lagging behind those that have been released in Korea in terms of megapixels and other features, we are catching up with higher-resolution

cameras in the 2 to 3MP range: Take a look at the Samsung SCH-a970 (\$489.99; www.samsung.com), a 2MP phone with a cool swivel design, or the 3.2MP Sony Ericsson K790a Cyber-shot (price TBA; www.sonyericsson.com).

Beyond megapixels, though, most camera phones don't have all the attributes of a digital camera that make good pictures; camera phones lack a good quality lens, optical zoom, white balance control, flash, etc. One model that's changing the face of cell phone picture-taking, though, is the Sony Ericsson K790a Cyber-shot mobile phone. In addition to 3.2MP, this camera phone offers autofocus, a Xenon flash, red-eye reduction, and image stabilization. It's PictBridge-compatible so you can output images to a PictBridge-enabled printer with a USB cable; and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

If your current phone has VGA resolution but you want print copies, don't go larger than 3 x 5-inch prints. And you might have fun using photo sticker paper. Canon's PS 101 Photo Stickers work with printers such as the Canon SELPHY DS700 Compact Photo Printer (\$129.99/printer; \$6.99/five 4 x 6 sheets with 16 stickers per sheet; www.canon.com) to make teeny tiny prints you can adhere to scrapbooks or envelopes.

At 1.3MP, you have a better shot of getting a decent 4 x 6-inch print, but you shouldn't have a problem printing with a 2MP camera phone. At 3MP, you can usually go to 5 x 7, and, if you follow some of the tips we've included in the "Camera Phone Picture-Taking Tips" sidebar (and you're adventurous), you might be able to squeeze out an acceptable 8 x 10. Remember, setting your printer at 300ppi (pixels per inch) will get you the highest quality prints, but you can always go to a lower ppi setting and still get a respectable, albeit not great, print. **FG**

BY THEANO NIKITAS

Know How

One Problem, Three Solutions

BY BRIAN HODGE

In the last four installments, we restored an old photo to its former greatness. The goal was to end up with a brand-new, high-resolution print. But sometimes you don't need that degree of resolution; sometimes high-resolution quality even works against you. This often becomes an issue when an image is destined for the Internet: on your Web site, in an eBay auction, on a photo-sharing page, in an email, etc.

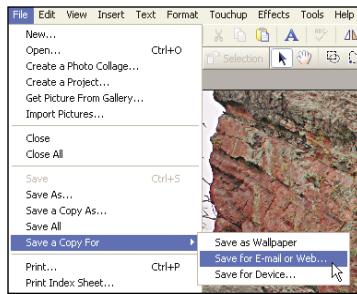
Most computer monitors have a display resolution of around 72dpi (dots per inch). On-screen, print quality resolution of 300dpi or higher won't make the image look any better. It will only slow down the transfer and probably exasperate the person waiting for it to appear on the other end.

Fortunately, our photo editors can optimize images for online use. The two most useful formats are JPEG, for normal photos, and GIF, for simpler graphics limited to 256 colors.

Microsoft Digital Image Pro 10

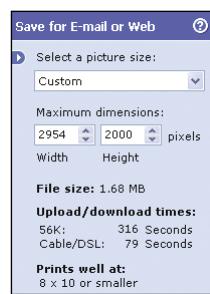
1

Click the File menu, select Save A Copy For, and then choose Save For E-mail Or Web



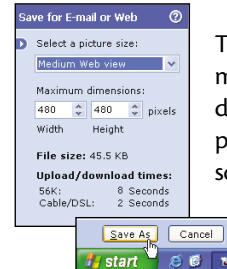
2

The activity panel shows the image's file size and pixel dimensions, as well as approximately how long it will take to transfer across a dial-up and high-speed Internet connection.



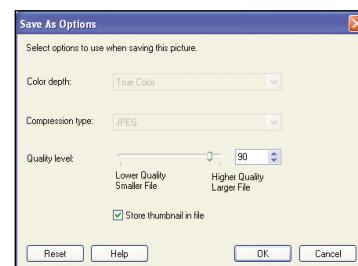
3

Click the drop-down menu to select from several sizes. Or, if you have another size in mind, leave the menu on Custom and set your dimensions in the Width and Height boxes. For each option, you'll see updated size and transfer estimates.

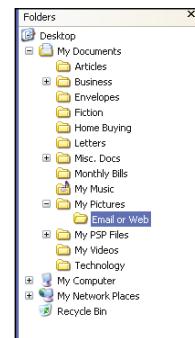


The presets are given in square dimensions (640 x 640 and so on), but don't let this fool you. Rectangular photos won't end up chopped or squashed. This simply indicates the maximum width or height. With your new size set, click the Save As button.

4



In the Save As dialogue box, you can rename the photo and navigate to the location where you want to store it. You can also click Options to adjust the Quality slider.



Click Save. If you haven't specified a location, the program automatically creates a new folder under My Pictures named Email Or Web.

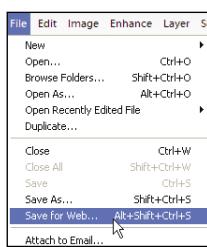
5

6

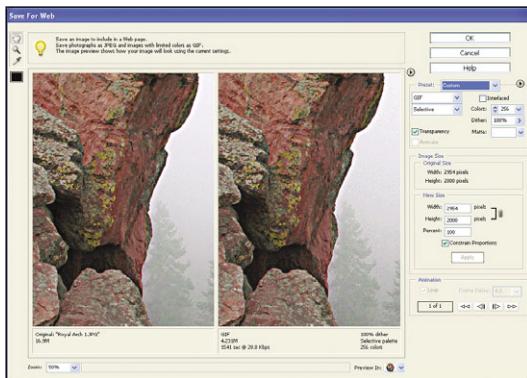
Adobe Photoshop Elements 3.0

1

Click File and select Save For Web.



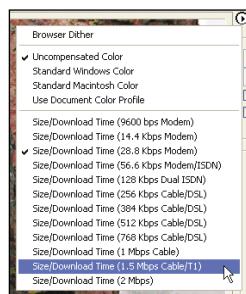
2



This opens a new workspace with Before/After views that immediately show any changes in visual quality, based on your settings.

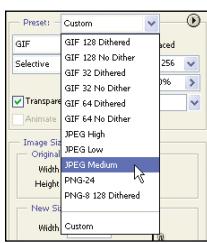
3

To change the online speed used for calculating download time and other Preview options, click the Preview Menu arrow button.



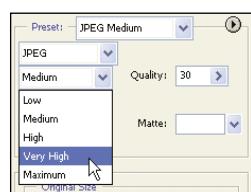
4

The Preset drop-down menu consists of combined quality and format settings. In most cases, you'll want to stick with JPEG or GIF.



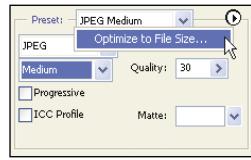
5

You can also configure custom quality options using the other menus.

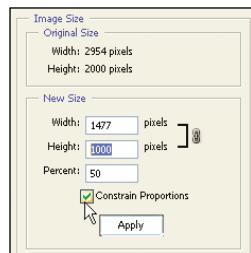


6

If you'd rather aim for a particular file size, click the Optimize To File Size arrow button, then set your figure in the dialogue box that opens.



7



To resize the photo, set a Percent figure, or new Width and/or Height values. As long as Constrain Proportions is checked, you only need to set one, and the others are calculated automatically. Then click Apply.

8

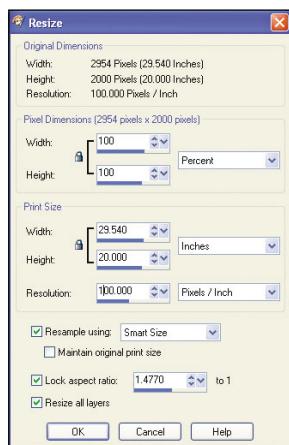
Click OK; rename the photo if needed and navigate to its destination folder and click Save.



Jasc Paint Shop Pro 9

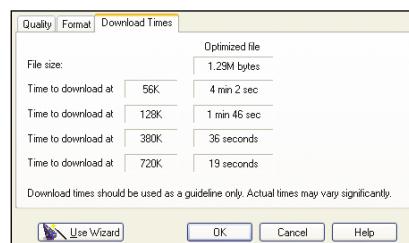
1

Paint Shop Pro doesn't have a consolidated Web optimizer, so you'll need separate tools for different tasks. If you plan to resize your image, do that first. Select Resize from the Image menu and set your desired values for Width, Height, and Resolution.



5

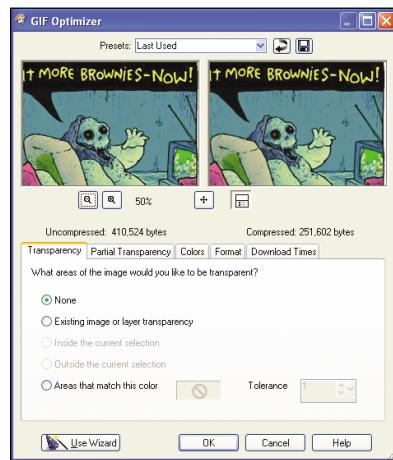
Click the Download Times tab to see how fast your image will transfer.



When you're satisfied with your settings, click OK.

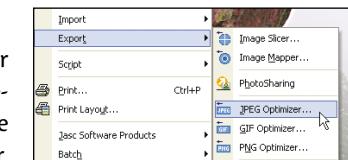
6

To optimize a GIF, click File, select Export, and choose GIF Optimizer. It's similar in layout to the JPEG Optimizer.



2

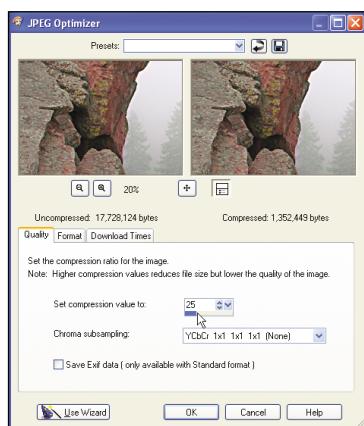
To optimize JPEGs for the Web, click File, select Export, and choose JPEG Optimizer.



3

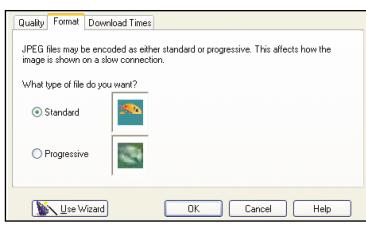
Under the Quality tab, adjust the Compression value. The Before/After views will let you compare the results.

The lower the Compression value, the higher the image quality will remain. You'll also see how much the file will shrink in data size.



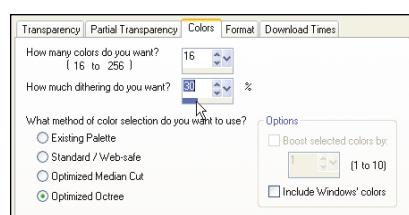
4

Under the Format tab, you can encode the photo to specify how it appears on a Web site accessed through a slow connection. Two thumbnails demonstrate these options.



7

The main section to be concerned with is the Colors tab. The fewer colors you use, the smaller the GIF will be, and the faster it will load. Dithering will offset some of the image degradation.



8

Check the Before/After panes to inspect the results and check your file size reduction.



tips

Frame & Hang Your Photos

1

Hang 'Em High

It will be easy to straighten your print later if its frame hangs on a horizontal wire. A serrated metal hanger in the center of the top edge should make the frame almost as easy to adjust. If your frame is heavy, and you can't put a nail into a wooden wall stud, shop for hanging hooks with broad bases that spread the load across several screws in the drywall.

2

Should You Print The Print?

Many of us take our digital pics to photo printing stores these days, and we generally get good-quality prints at a reasonable price. That price inflates sharply when you're asking for an 8 x 10, however. You might be able to print your own for less money and make it pretty enough so that no one will know the difference. If your inkjet printer is good at making photos, buy some matte-finish photo inkjet paper specifically made for your brand of printer. (We've found that brand-specific paper usually resists smearing and fading the best.) Print your pic at the highest quality setting. Note that some inkjets provide two extra inks, photo magenta and photo cyan, that make people's skin look better in photos. Other printers can make "archival" prints, meaning they may last for decades under glass without fading.

3

The Final Cut

After you've made a practice mat (so you don't mess up the real deal), place it on the real mat stock and trace its edges. Cut the real mat's hole along a straight edge with a fresh blade. For a thick mat, a beveled inner edge (one cut at an angle) generally looks the best because the mat material's natural color will make a nice contrast with its exterior hue. However, if you don't use a tool, such as one from Logan (www.logan-graphic.com), to cut the bevel at a consistent angle, it will look thicker in some areas than others. Choose a mat that complements the photo and/or the area you'll hang it in, but stick with a neutral color so it doesn't draw the eye from your photo.

4

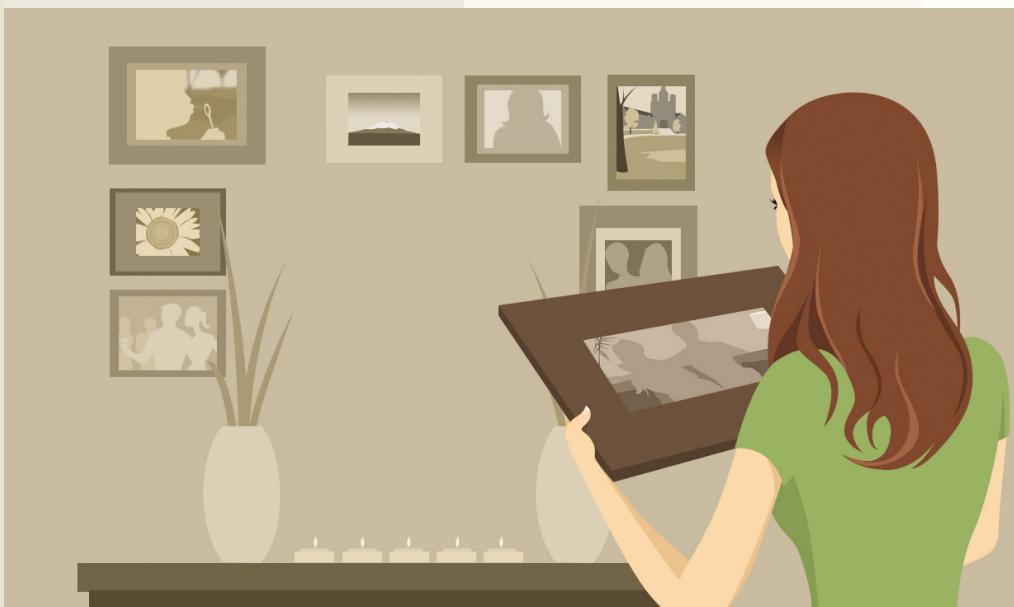
Get Framed

Next, choose a frame that's big enough for your photo print, if not a little larger. You don't need a frame that fits exactly, as you can fill in the space between the photo and the frame with a mat (sometimes spelled "matte"), which is a tinted card with a rectangular hole in the middle. An ugly frame will distract from the photo, so keep it tasteful. Also, make sure the frame comes with glass or plastic to protect the print from spills, scratches, dust, smoke, and perhaps UV light.

5

Practice Mat

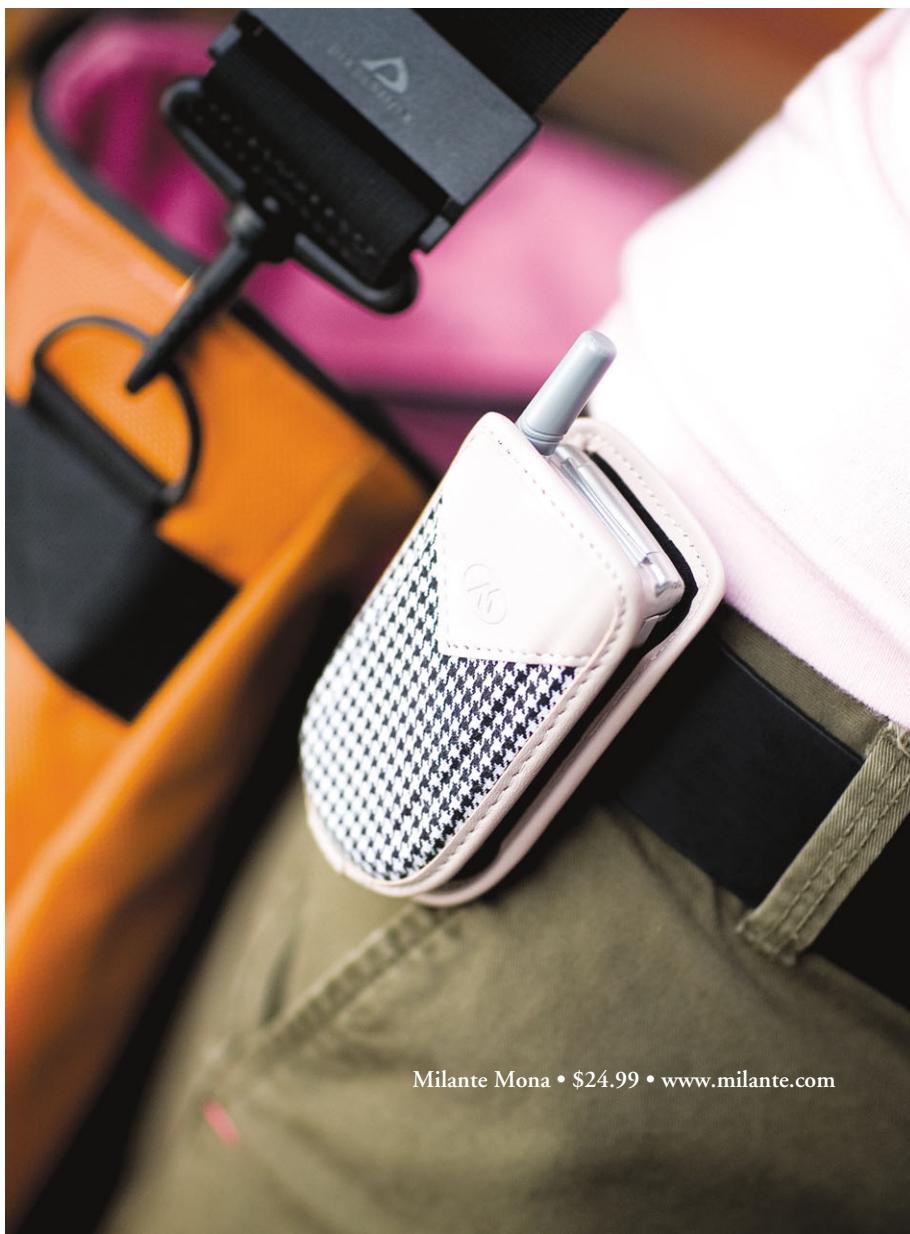
Speaking of the mat, this is the hardest thing to make when framing a photo. Many of us are better off buying a premade mat or asking a photo professional to cut a custom one. If you decide to make your own, then make a practice mat with cardstock or construction paper first. To make the rectangular photo hole with perfect 90-degree corners, use an L-shaped hobby square or one corner of the frame as a guide. Because the mat will cover the outer edges of the picture, you can "crop" the image by making your custom mat's hole smaller.



BY MARTY SEMS

from drab TO FAB

Accessorize Your Cell Phone



Milante Mona • \$24.99 • www.milante.com

shelf Watch

Jabra BT325s

\$89.99 • www.jabra.com

Cell phones that double as digital music players are music to the ears of bustling executives who spend as much time on the phone as they do grooving to Gnarls Barkley. Jabra's BT325s is a Bluetooth headset (with an integrated microphone and volume control) and corded stereo headphones that let you effortlessly switch between your tunes and your calls. The BT325s offers eight hours of talk/music time and 240 hours of standby time.



A

fter dropping a chunk of change and tethering yourself to a cell carrier for a couple of years, you have finally found the "cool" cell phone you've wanted for a while. Unfortunately, most of your friends and co-workers have now done the same. So, if you set your phone down at a meeting or party, it's hard to keep track of which phone belongs to whom.

There's an easy way to distinguish your cell phone from the bunch: personalize it. In doing so, not only will you know which phone belongs to you, but also your phone will reflect your personal style. Whether you have a Palm Treo 700w (\$399; www.palm.com/us), Motorola RAZR V3c (\$289.99; www.motorola.com), RIM BlackBerry 8700c (\$349; www.blackberry.com), Motorola PEBL (\$299.99), or another popular phone, a little shopping will yield plenty of accessories made to suit your phone.

Protective Cases With Style

Belt clips and waistline cell phone pouches may work well for men, but they're hardly an option for many women who would rather go to the dentist than add bulk to their mid sections. Instead of trading looks for protection, we went on a hunt for cell phone cases that are both sleek and stylish.

In our quest to find protection and beauty, we found quite a few cases to suit nearly any lifestyle. Milante's Mona case (\$24.99; www.milante.com),

part of the Bengina collection, is available in five colors: pink, blue, yellow, red, and brown. A classic, color-tinted houndstooth material and leather accents covers this case. The *Mona* case looks elegant and is tough enough to protect nearly any flip phone or small slider from other objects in your purse or bag.

If you prefer to wear your cell phone over your shoulder, the Baggallini Flip Phone Case (\$17.95 or \$19.95; www.baggallini.com) might be the case for you. Wear the case over your shoulder, around your waist, or attached to another bag using the included 52-inch adjustable strap, belt clip, and 3-inch strap. The Flip Phone Case is great for traveling light and includes a zippered compartment for carrying your ID, money, keys, and lipstick. You can

choose from six microfiber colors, 13 crinkle nylon colors, and 10 ripstop nylon colors to find a case to suit your needs and style.

For a professional and timeless look, consider the Palm Treo Vertical Pouch (\$49.99; www.senacases.com) from SENA CASES. This leather case has a soft velvet lining to protect your Treo, and you can choose a black, brown, or red pouch to match your briefcase. The magnetic closure will keep your Treo in the case, even if you toss it in your briefcase or carry-on bag.

Handy Headsets

Don't ruin a stylish look with wires. Maintain a streamlined appearance by adding a small Bluetooth headset to your phone that will also keep your hands free

Pretty & Practical

Just about everyone—fashion lovers included—will admit that functionality and protection is important, especially for our expensive electronics. To guard against drops and scratches, consider buying a strap or skin for your phone.

SkinIt (www.skinit.com) makes protective sticker coverings for cell phones. Choose a design from SkinIt's library or use the photo uploader to create your own skin. The skins start at \$9.95 and are made of thin vinyl, so they won't add bulk to your phone; they're also tough and help protect against scratches.

If you'd rather make a skin at home, Printz skins (\$14.99; www.customprintz.com) let you design and print a decal using your inkjet printer. The durable vinyl material conforms to the shape of your phone and protects it from bumps and scratches, and the adhesive doesn't leave gooey remnants if you remove the skin. Cell phones and water don't mix, so to help protect our phones and skins from moisture, Printz are water-resistant, as well.

Anything that renders your cell phone useless (falling from the roof of your car where you accidentally left it, for instance), can erase the names and numbers in your phonebook. The CellStick (\$39.99; www.sparktech.com) backs up the phonebook, and its software lets you add, delete, and edit contacts on your computer so you don't have to fumble with the tiny keypad on the phone. ●



Glam It Up

Just as jewelry can add flair to an outfit, gems and charms can add personality and character to a cell phone. Init's Bling Self-Adhesive Stones (from \$7.99; www.bestbuy.com) are an easy way to attach gems to your phone. Select a pattern of stones in many colors; because the stones are self-adhesive, you won't have to worry about creating a sticky mess with glue. For extra bling, some kits have extra gemstones to apply around your screen.

Creative types can craft custom designs on their phones using any or all of the 300 acrylic crystals in the Bling Ring Too! Individual Crystals Kit (\$10; www.myblingring.com). From the more than 20 colors available, you may choose two colors per kit; however, to make the application easy, the crystals have a peel-off sticker back.

In addition to appending crystals to your cell phone, you can also add some sparkle with a charm. We especially like the Always-Charming Pink Hibiscus Flower w/Pink Sandal Cell Phone Charm (\$12; www.always-charming.com). These charms attach to a loop hole on your cell phone. If your phone doesn't have a loop hole, you can attach the string to the inside of the battery cover. ●

for other things, such as painting your nails or shopping.

All of us know that size matters when it comes to things attached to our ears. BluePearls Life (\$89.95; bluepearls.us) headsets are designed specifically for women. These ultra-lightweight headsets weigh less than 0.028 ounces and are lighter than some earrings we wear. Choose a headset in black, silver, or white and add one of the nine included interchangeable faceplates. Best of all,



Always-Charming Pink Hibiscus Flower w/Pink Sandal Cell Phone Charm

• \$12 • www.always-charming.com

this headset's battery lasts for up to 18 hours—plenty of time for shopping, cooking, and playing with the cat.

Another wireless headset, the Jabra BT160 (\$59; www.jabra.com), is lightweight and small. It weighs approximately half an ounce and measures about 1 x 2.5 x 0.5 inches (HxWxD). The BT160 also has a removable cover that's available in 33 designs so you can personalize the headset to fit your outfit, purse, phone, or mood. You can even create

your own cover using the BT160 skin designer on Jabra's Web site. With voice activated dialing and answer and end call buttons, you can place and receive calls from the headset without fumbling around for the handset in your purse.

Go Shopping

There are so many cell phone accessories available that we can't begin to cover them all here. When you go shopping, also look for customized faceplates

that will protect your phone and replace the current cover if it's cracked or scratched. Many shopping malls have kiosks with faceplates for the most popular phones, and online stores also offer a good selection, too. In addition, online retailers frequently offer additional accessories, such as antenna rings, straps, and other forms of jewelry and protection for your phone. **FG**

BY JENNIFER JOHNSON

CE@Home

Shopping Tips

Buying Office Furniture

BY MARTY SEMS

W

hether you're shopping for a computer desk, a printer stand, or some other major addition to your office, it pays to keep a few things in mind. Better yet, tear out this page and take it with you as you shop.

Measure the room beforehand to get an idea of the size of furniture you're looking for. If your new desk is too big, clashes with the wood trim, or makes it awkward to walk through the rest of the room, it will bug you for years. On the other hand, office furniture that's just right will make you comfortable and productive.

Always pay attention to the quality of the piece. On the showroom floor, does the desk or stand feel sturdy? Would you trust it to hold your expensive computer and monitor? Does the display model in the store resist scratches, and is it easy to clean?

If you have an oversized monitor, make sure it will physically fit on a desk with overhead shelves or cabinets. Double check the height and placement of your desk lamp to make sure it won't lead to glare on your monitor. Also, if you use more than one display, you'll need more desktop space than a typical user with one monitor. Are the desk's drawers deep enough? As for a printer stand, make sure it has enough space underneath for a few reams of paper. What about a smaller compartment for specialty papers, such as glossy photo stock, or for an address book?

Your comfort is the main thing when you're buying an office chair, but it's important when you're looking for a desk, too. Is the keyboard tray ergonomically adjustable for height? Should you add a tilting foot stand? Is it easy to reach everything on the desk when you're seated? Will your monitor sit high enough so that your eyes are level with its top edge?

Computer furniture should have holes for cables in all the right places. Behind the monitor is the most crucial location for a cable hole, but it's nice to have another where a printer or scanner might go. If you plan to put your PC in a cabinet under the desk, make sure there are places for cables to snake through—not to mention front-to-back airflow.

Does the desk or stand come with any sort of cable management accessories? A built-in clip or conduit can really take the tangles out of any PC's wiring, and it will make your office look neater, too. Also, some recent office furniture comes with its own power strip or surge suppressor, but this shouldn't be a deciding factor for you. More importantly, ensure that you completely understand the terms of the warranty agreement.

SHOPPING CHECKLIST

What extra features does the furniture have?

- ergonomic adjustability
- storage space
- cable holes

What color are you looking for?

- light woodgrain
- medium woodgrain
- dark woodgrain
- white
- black

How long is the warranty?

- 30 days
- 90 days
- 1 year

What accessories come with the furniture?

- cable clips
- power strip
- foot board
- pen drawer organizer
- file drawer trellis

Notes

 CUT HERE

Gift Of The Month

Oregon Scientific Wireless BBQ Thermometer

The best part of summertime is grilling out. Just the smell of your neighbor's barbecue is enough to make your mouth water. Next thing you know, you're making a mental list of the grillables you have in your freezer, thinking up side dishes, and...

Hey, wait a minute. Do you really have time to grill? You have umpteen other things going on at the moment, and all of them are indoors, away from the barbie. Besides, the last time you tried to multitask while grilling didn't turn out so well (although your pets thought the crispy, black treats were yummy).

As you've probably guessed, it's technology to the rescue once again. Our Gift Of The Month for September is the Wireless BBQ Thermometer from Oregon Scientific (\$39.95; item AW129; www.oregonscientific.com).

Absentee Grilling

Here's how the thermometer works. You insert a stainless steel probe into your food. Next, set the probe's wireless sending unit somewhere outside the grill, closing the lid gently on the cable. The probe will monitor your

food's internal temperature as it cooks.

When your grillables reach the temp you want, or a level of doneness such as "medium" or "well-done," the probe will signal you up to 100 feet away via the handheld monitor. Of course, you'll still want to check on your food once in a while in case a flare-up is singeing things.

A college student would love one of these. Too often, an inexperienced griller can burn his food because he got distracted by something (probably studying). The same thing goes for first-time home buyers, who may be spending so much time looking for the box with their cutlery and plates in it that they forget about the salmon steaks. A daddy will also appreciate a beeping reminder that his food is done, especially when he's been unexpectedly sidetracked cleaning his toddler's dinner out of her hair.

There's a safety benefit, too. Meat's supposed to be cooked to at least 160 degrees Fahrenheit (hotter for poultry) on the inside. Some vegetables need to reach a certain temp to kill off viruses and microorganisms, too. The Wireless BBQ Thermometer lets you know when that temperature is reached without all the guesswork. You also won't have to cut the meat anymore to check its doneness, so more of the juices will stay inside. Use the probe in your oven when you cook a turkey, which, as anyone who's ever hosted Thanksgiving knows, would be a huge help during dinner preparations.

Come to think of it, there are a lot of reasons to give this gift to *yourself*. 

BY MARTY SEMS



Kids & Technology

Tweens & Cell Phones

Introducing your kids to CE devices can reap a number of benefits for them and you. This is particularly true of cell phones. With a mobile phone, he can always contact you, and you can keep track of his whereabouts.

When you decide that your child should have a cell phone, you can find a phone and service plan that's best suited for her age. For tweens (ages 8 to 12), you can buy a phone that keeps them in contact and you in control.

LG Migo VX-1000

This may be the cutest phone we've ever seen, with its bright green shell and Pokémon-like antennas. But you and your kids won't be won over by *just* the LG Migo's cuteness.

The simplicity of this phone makes it ideal for younger children. You can program the four quick-dial keys, which means your tween can call only four people. Assign the 10 ringtones to incoming calls from certain numbers, so that your child can know who is calling him just by hearing the ring. And there's a big red button kids can press in case of an emergency.

The LG Migo is available from Verizon (www.verizonwireless.com) for \$49.99 for a two-year plan or \$99.99 for a one-year plan. Individual monthly plans start at \$39.99, or your child can use the LG Migo as part of Verizon's America's Choice Family SharePlan, which starts at

\$69.99 monthly for two lines and \$9.99 for each additional line.

Firefly

The functions of the Firefly (\$99.99; www.fireflymobile.com) phone are similar

to the Migo's. The five buttons give kids one-touch access to frequently called numbers; we especially like the dedicated Mom and Dad buttons. In addition, the Firefly comes with a 20-number phone book, and the phone will reject calls that don't come from one of those numbers.

Disney Mobile LG DM-L200
\$199.99 • www.disneymobile.com



Kids will like the many ways they can accessorize and personalize the phone, from bright, translucent shells (\$12.99) to mesh pouches that attach to your child's belt loop (\$9.99). Both of these, and many other fun accessories, are available on Firefly's Web site.

But the feature parents may like the most is that this phone is pay-as-you-go. Kids can use the nationwide service provided by Cingular for 25 cents per minute. The phone comes with 30 minutes of paid airtime, and you can buy airtime cards either at the Firefly Web site or at Target. Unused minutes expire within 90 days of purchase.

Disney Mobile

In June, Disney Mobile (www.disneymobile.com) jumped into the cell phone service market with family service plans and Family Center features. In addition, Disney Mobile is selling two Disney-branded phones. The plans and phones are better suited for older children (middle schoolers) and their parents.

Two-line family plans start at \$59.99 monthly, with additional lines for \$9.99 per month. The one feature of the Disney Mobile plans and phones that may give parents pause is that kids can browse the Web and send images. Such features may increase kids' temptation to use the phone in an inappropriate manner, but Disney does provide ways to monitor their use. Family Center features let you:

- determine which days of the week and which hours of the day kids can use their phones
- designate phone numbers as "restricted" or "always on"
- set spending allowances and track usage of voice minutes, picture and text messaging, downloadable content, and Web use

A Mobile Chaperone

As you search for the right cell phone for your son or daughter, find out whether the phone is GPS-equipped and either comes with or has an optional GPS service or LBS (location-based service) so you can monitor your child's whereabouts remotely.

Verizon offers its new Chaperone service for an additional \$9.99 a month. By looking on your cell phone or at a special Web site for Chaperone subscribers, you

can locate your child's phone. If you sign up for Chaperone with Child Zone (\$19.99 monthly), you'll be notified when your child arrives near or leaves a certain place. You must have text messaging on your phone to receive the Child Zone alerts.

Sprint Nextel also launched an LBS plan earlier this year. The Sprint Family Locator (\$9.99 monthly; www.sprint.com) lets you locate your child either through your registered mobile phone or through a Web site. ●



- track your child's phone through GPS service, if available

With the Family Alert! feature, anyone receiving a prioritized message will see the message right away when she opens the phone, and will have to acknowledge the message before using the phone for any other reason.

The Disney-branded phones are the DM-P100 from Pantech (\$149.99), which has a built-in camera, and the DM-L200 from LG (\$199.99). This model has both a built-in camera and camcorder and Bluetooth capability. Although these phones have too many high-end features for young kids, they are suitable for older children and will grow with them nicely into high school.

Safety, Not Status

New technologies don't faze kids, so they might not need much guidance in learning how to operate a cell phone. Tweens

do, however, need to understand why you've given them a phone. They may think a cell phone is some sort of status symbol, but you know it's for their safety.

Remind them that a cell phone is a privilege, and you'll have an easier time maintaining parental control. ☐

BY RACHEL DEROWITSCH

shelf Watch

Mustek MP95
\$199 • www.mustek.com



Your kids will love Mustek's MP95 for watching "High School Musical" in your Honda Odyssey on the way to Six Flags; you'll love keeping it in the kitchen to follow along as your "Martha Stewart Cooking Collection" DVDs guide you to another culinary masterpiece. The MP95's 9-inch widescreen display makes DVDs look and sound fantastic, with progressive scan and 5.1-channel virtual 3D surround sound, respectively. And if you'd prefer music to movies, the MP95 plays CDs, CD-Rs, CD-RWs, and MP3 CDs.

tips

Make Your
Home Conducive
To Studying

1

Less Is More

Although CE devices are fun and downright useful in many situations, they can be quite distracting at times, as well. Make sure there is a quiet place for studying in your home, without the distraction of TV, cell phones, and portable DVD players. These gadgets all have their places, but it's hard to argue that they're beneficial when studying. Also, if your student needs to call a classmate about a particular assignment, consider limiting the length of the call so the conversation stays on topic.

2

Do It Yourself

With the help of your PC, you can turn out a multitude of study aids. Create a calendar (Microsoft Works has several good templates) and make note of assignments, due dates, soccer games, and band practice. Post the completed calendar on the refrigerator or perhaps on a bulletin board in each child's bedroom. Having everything written down and in one place can help keep everyone on task. Also, printing your own flash cards can be a project everyone can help with and learn from. You could even include pictures from your digital camera on each card as appropriate.

3

It's A Small World

Learning doesn't—and shouldn't—stop at school. With the advent of the Internet, the world gets to be a smaller place every day. Make it a habit to sit down with your kids at the computer and look through stories in a newspaper in a town different from your own. Nearly every major foreign and domestic newspaper is online, which makes it easy to get a quick glimpse at news around the globe. Additionally, Google News (news.google.com) presents a wide variety of stories from all sorts of sources (and it's customizable). Staying abreast of current events is key to a well-rounded education.

4

I've Got
The Music In Me

A good number of scholars swear by listening to classical music while they're studying. It provides for a bit of background noise, and its lack of lyrics will keep your mind from wandering. Burn a CD of classical favorites—iTunes and its brethren provide a bevy of options, and making a mix CD with songs from classical discs you already own is a snap. Another option is to make a classical playlist on an iPod and then listen to it either with headphones or earbuds (if your sister is studying for tomorrow's French test—mon dieu!) or via an iPod-compatible player, such as the iHome iH5 (\$99.95; www.ihomedirect.com).

5

Silence Is Golden

It's hard to catch a quiet moment in a busy household, and the girl who's still studying for her French test while her sister hacks through "Stars And Stripes Forever" on her trumpet may end up screaming, "Sacre bleu!" Invest in a pair of active noise-cancelling headphones to keep the peace. Although they're pricey, such headphones combine inverse signals with the surrounding audio to eliminate outside noises. The beauty behind many models is that you don't even have to have music being piped into the headphones—you can just as easily listen to the sound of silence as "The Sound Of Silence." One good option is Sony's MDR-NC50 (\$199.99; www.sonystyle.com). Refurbished models are also available (\$134.98).



BY SALLY MAREK CURRAN

Wake up to your music.

The new iHome iH5™ wakes you gradually and lulls you to sleep with your iPod® music. The iH5 Reson8 speakers have incredibly rich, natural stereo sound. It has a digital AM/FM clock radio. And it does all this while charging your iPod, so it's ready to go when you are.

iHome is home base.

iHome iH5

To order, visit
www.ihomedirect.com
Or call toll free
1.800.925.6224
30 day risk-free trial!



For all docking iPods®
including nano!



iHome is a trademark of SDI Technologies Inc.

iPod is a registered trademark owned by Apple Computer Inc. in the U.S. and in other countries.

*except iPod® shuffle. iPod not included.

iHome
www.ihomedirect.com

music & movies

music

BY SAM EVANS

John Pizzarelli

• Available: Now • Price: \$15.99

**DEAR MR. SINATRA**

[Telarc Records]

Michael Bublé has been the hot name in the neo-rat pack jazz movement that we're experiencing, but "Dear Mr. Sinatra" uses favorites from Ol' Blue Eyes to display the talents of another fine jazz musician, John Pizzarelli.

Pizzarelli's voice has a light and breathy timbre that doesn't demand the attention of your ear so much as it slyly coaxes your toe to start tapping and draws your voice out of its shell to join his. Also nice is his distinct diction; you won't struggle to make out the lyrics to these classic tunes.

"Dear Mr. Sinatra" features favorites such as "You Make Me Feel So Young," "Witchcraft," and "I've Got You Under My Skin." Fans of the more traditional-sounding jazz orchestra music are sure to enjoy these classics. Or if you're just getting into jazz, then you'll love the easy, carefree sound of John Pizzarelli as he croons the tunes of a true legend.

Nina Gordon

• Available: Now • Price: \$13.98

BLEEDING HEART GRAFFITI

[Warner Bros.]

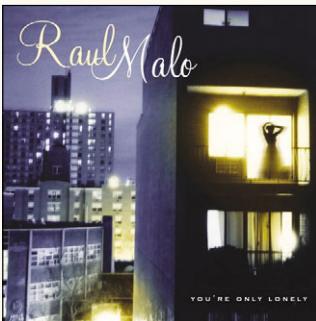
Nina Gordon fans have been waiting six long years for a follow up to her first solo album "Tonight And The Rest Of My Life." In "Bleeding Heart Graffiti," Gordon sticks with the format of combining sharp lyrics with the infectious rock-pop beats that made her first album a success.

Raul Malo

• Available: Now • Price: \$18.98

YOU'RE ONLY LONELY

[Sanctuary Records]



Anyone who's ever heard a song by The Mavericks has undoubtedly marveled at the smooth warbling of lead singer Raul Malo. The vocalist has shed The Mavericks to release "You're Only Lonely." The album features songs from the Everly Brothers, Ron Sexsmith, and Etta James to showcase his range and vocal virtuosity.

Kill Hannah

• Available: Now • Price: \$13.98

UNTIL THERE'S NOTHING LEFT OF US

[Atlantic Records]

This album is great for anyone who still has a t-shirt of the band Garbage hanging in the back of the closet. Kill Hannah's sound is a blend of electronica and glam-rock cloaked in a futuristic gothic wrapper. Think Ziggy Stardust meets Orgy (a strange but intriguing combination that's definitely worth your time).

London Philharmonic Orchestra CONDUCTED BY Stephen Simon

• Available: Now • Price: \$16.98

THE SORCERER'S APPRENTICE

[Magic Maestro Music]



The latest installment from the Stories in Music series features the London Philharmonic Orchestra performing Dukas' famous piece "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." To spice it up a bit, this rendition is accompanied by a narration performed by Yadu, as well as tracks explaining the origin of the piece and a biography of the composer.

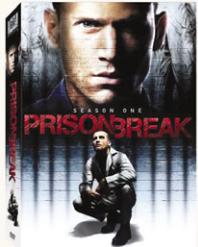


movies

BY VINCE COGLEY

"Prison Break"—Season One

\$28.98 • RATING: R • AVAILABLE: NOW



The title of Fox's freshman sensation seems to suggest that the series doesn't lend itself to longevity. After all, once a successful prison break occurs, the show essentially thwarts its own premise (or does it?). After seeing his brother Lincoln Burrows' (Dominic Purcell of "Equilibrium") appeal declined, structural engineer Michael Scofield (Wentworth Miller), believing his brother to be the victim of a conspiracy, hatches a plan to spring Lincoln from the clink. After attempting a bank heist to deliberately and conveniently land himself behind the bars of the same prison as Lincoln, Michael sets his scheme

in motion. One part "Shawshank Redemption," one part "Lost," and one part "Escape from Alcatraz," "Prison Break" has enough twists and turns to keep you locked in voluntary solitary confinement for the season's 22 episodes. Guys will love the action; gals will love the lead actors.

"V for Vendetta" (Widescreen Two-Disc Special Edition)

\$39.95 • RATING: NOT RATED • AVAILABLE: NOW



Based on the graphic novel (OK, comic book) of the same name, "V for Vendetta" marks the return of "The Matrix" Andy and Larry Wachowski to screenwriting for the first time since "The Matrix Revolutions." Fellow "The Matrix" alum Hugo Weaving ("Proof," "The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King") stars as V, the archetypal anti-hero. Set in a not-too-distant future totalitarian U.K., "V for Vendetta" unfolds much like "1984." Natalie Portman ("Where the Heart Is," "Garden State") plays Evey Hamilton, a young girl who works for the state-run media; V rescues her from fascist clutches and enlists her in his underground

struggle. Dazzling visual effects and spectacularly choreographed fight scenes make the movie worth watching, especially when its political pontifications become obvious. After playing second fiddle to Keanu Reeves and Viggo Mortensen, Weaving shows he's clearly capable of leading roles.

"Scary Movie 4" (Unrated Widescreen Edition)

\$28.95 • RATING: R • AVAILABLE: NOW

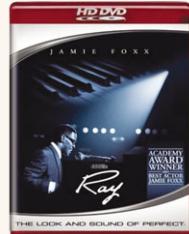


Anna Faris ("Waiting," "Just Friends") and Regina Hall ("King's Ransom," "The Honeymooners") return for the fourth installment of the "Scary Movie" franchise that has expanded beyond lampooning horror movies to mock every flick audiences will conceivably recognize. The plot—if it matters—revolves around Cindy Campbell's

(Faris), the heroine of the previous three films, move into a haunted house and her quest to uncover its mystery. Meanwhile, her neighbor is Tom Ryan (Craig Bierko of "Cinderella Man"), who, in an obvious parody of 2005's "War of the Worlds," must protect his family from an alien invasion. The flimsiest of plot devices keep "Scary

"Ray" HD DVD

\$29.98 • RATING: R • AVAILABLE: NOW



This moving biopic earned multi-talented star Jamie Foxx ("Any Given Sunday," "Collateral") an Academy Award for his depiction of legendary musician Ray Charles. Almost everyone is familiar with Charles' remarkable musical prowess and innovation (and if you aren't, you should be, too), but the film takes a close look at the challenges beyond mere blindness he had to face daily. Although "Ray" has been available on DVD for a while, it's one of the early HD DVD titles, so expect fantastic image quality to accompany this fantastic film. Just as the film boldly shows the open racism of the era, it unabashedly confronts Charles' personal failings. Charles died a few months before the film's theatrical release and his posthumous masterstroke, "Genius Loves Company," but Foxx and Director Taylor Hackford ("Dolores Claiborne," "Proof of Life") immortalized him in this memorable movie.

games



for you & the people in your life

BY VINCE COGLEY

Star Fox Command

• PRICE: \$34.99



RATING



Nintendo

Gas up your Arwing and set off to save the galaxy again, as Nintendo's Star Fox franchise hits the Nintendo DS. Star Fox Command lets players use their DS' touchscreen to both fly their own Arwings and draw flight plans to courageously lead their wingmen into battle. By using the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection, you can play against three other opponents anywhere in the world.

• NINTENDO
• WWW.NINTENDO.COM

LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy

• PRICE: \$29.99 (GAME BOY ADVANCE)
\$39.99 (ALL OTHER CONSOLES)



RATING



Multiplatform

Combining the endless possibilities of a pile of LEGOs with George Lucas's legendary space opera, LEGO Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy chronicles the adventures of Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and the film's other heroes (in LEGO form). This game is good, family fun and a great way to introduce your little ones to "Star Wars." In true LEGO fashion, you can create custom LEGO Star Wars characters.

• LUCASARTS ENTERTAINMENT
• WWW.LUCASARTS.COM

The Suite Life of Zack and Cody: Tipton Trouble

• PRICE: \$29.99



RATING



Nintendo DS

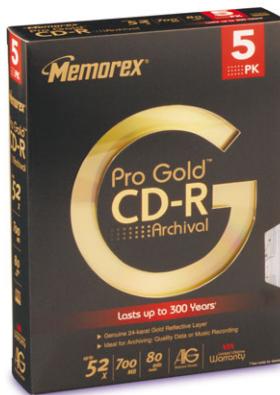
This title, based on Disney's hit TV show, lets you play along with the two troublesome twins who reside in the Tipton Hotel. Take control of Zack and his skateboard or help Cody shoot aliens, robots, and ghosts with his vacuum. You can dress the twins in a variety of disguises and play mini-games against a friend using your DS' wireless capabilities. If your kids are Disney Channel junkies, then they'll love this title.

• BUENA VISTA GAMES
• WWW.BUENAVISTAGAMES.GO.COM

Memorex Pro Gold Archival Media

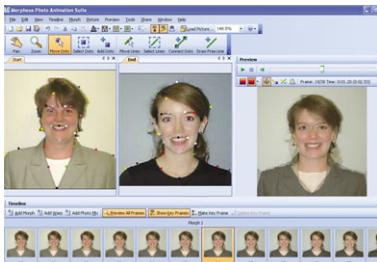
• WWW.MEMOREX.COM • PRICE: \$12.99 - \$24.99

For the family historian, or anyone looking to preserve his precious memories, here's a gift that will outlast a lifetime. Memorex's Pro Gold CD-Rs (www.memorex.com) should retain data for about 300 years, the company says, thanks to a 24-karat gold reflective layer and special recording dye. Baby photos, wedding pics, video clips of graduation day . . . these deserve the best protection available. The CD-Rs come in \$12.99 3-packs or \$19.99 5-packs. Pro Gold DVD-Rs don't cost much more at \$14.99 for three and \$24.99 for five, but they have lower 100-year ratings. Leave a note for your descendants to copy your DVDs to some other format in 99 years.



Morpheus Photo Animation Suite 3 Standard

• WWW.ANIMATEPHOTOS.COM • PRICE: \$59.95



Kids, tweens, and parents will have hours of rainy day fun with this software suite (\$59.95). You can morph two or more photos so that one person turns into another in an animated clip. Next, load a photo of the dog and crazily warp his eyes and tongue until he looks like a friend of Ren & Stimpy. Finally, mix a photo of your nephew and his girlfriend so you can tease him about how their future children might look. The suite's components, Photo Morpher, Photo Warper, and Photo Mixer, are also sold separately; our screenshot is from the pricier Industrial suite (\$199.95). Check out the examples at www.animatephotos.com for more goofy ideas.

Yoda Plush Backpack

• WWW.THINKGEEK.COM • PRICE: \$39.99

"Judge me by my size, do you?" Kids of all ages are clamoring for one of these. It's a backpack that looks like Yoda clinging to Luke Skywalker's back, teaching him how to become a Jedi in "The Empire Strikes Back." These are apparently hot sellers at vendors such as www.thinkgeek.com (\$39.99) and www.fantasytoyland.com (\$29.95) at press time. We're still trying to get one for editor Katie Sommer, who's all psyched up for her personal photo shoot, tentatively titled "Yoga With Master Yoda." (Photo courtesy of ThinkGeek.com.)



... & gifts

on the lighter side of technology

BY MARTY SEMS

what they're SAYIN

BY KATHRYN DOLAN

Somewhat unexpectedly, none of the four women we talked to this month buy their electronics online. Most said they research products online, but they go to the store to see, feel, and test the products before buying.

Kristi Crooks

GRADUATE STUDENT

Kristi spent her summer in graduate school, working toward a Master's degree in Education. Now, she's back in her third-grade classroom at St. Wenceslaus, where she's taught for 2 1/2 years.

Although Kristi shops online, she prefers to head to a retail store when she's buying electronics. "Basi-

ally, I think of those items as a big investment, and I don't buy something like that on a whim," she says.

"Personally, I like to be able to see, touch, and handle those devices before buying them, and I especially like having the one-on-one interaction with a sales-

person. I can ask ques-

tions and get an imme-

diate response." Kristi says

she often researches her poten-

tial purchases online, but a sales-

person tosses in additional info that she may not find online.

Kristi says, "I buy books, coffees and teas, and, every now and then, clothing online. I don't often buy clothes online, though, because I like to try on what I'm buying. But I've always bought my textbooks online." She also says she saves a great deal of money buying the textbooks used from Half.com or

Amazon.com, even with the shipping charges figured in. She says brand-new textbooks are sometimes harder to find, but she's never had any trouble finding used textbooks at either place.



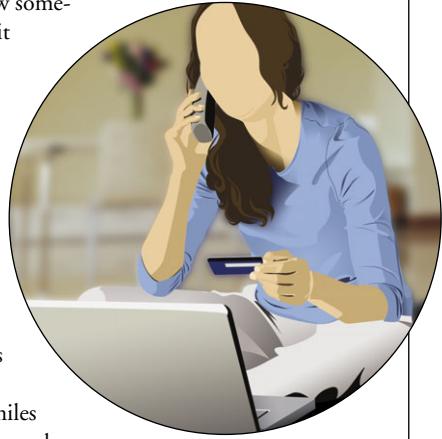
Christa Yoakum

MOM

Christa is the director of The Arbors, an assisted-living facility for people with Alzheimer's disease, and she's the mother of four boys. "Although my sons have done the research to purchase their electronics, like iRiver MP3 players, online, they also like to go to the store; and to tell you the truth, we've had some dissatisfaction in trying to get products serviced when using manufacturers' Web sites. I've clicked pages that are blank or not yet in service, and that's very frustrating. When I buy something at a store, I know I can walk back into that store anytime for service."

She continues, "When I buy a digital camera, printer, or two-way radio, for instance, I like to hear about the features and how the salesperson compares products. Not that I rely on that totally because I do my own research, but I like talking to a person familiar with the product and asking my own questions. Often the salesperson has personal experience with the product, and I find that helpful. Plus, it's hard for me to know exactly how something works until I see it and touch it."

That's not to say Christa doesn't shop online for anything. Her youngest son Topper (Christopher) is a cross-country runner for his high school, and he has to replace each pair of shoes as he racks up the recommended maximum number of miles on them. Christa usually orders the shoes, shirts, and other gear he wants from Eastbay (www.eastbay.com).





Do you shop online or in stores for CE devices? Why?

Karen "Cookie" Rosen

EMPTY NESTER

Cookie knew growing up in Arkansas that she was heading west as soon as humanly possible, and a week after turning 18, she did just that. She's been working at the same bank in the San Diego, Calif.-area for 29 years. Cookie and her husband, Lawrence, raised their three daughters, saw them off to college, and are now watching and cheering as they begin careers of their own.

Computers and shopping online are a big part of her busy family's life. "Oh, gosh, I've shopped online for years and years; you can't beat the convenience," says Cookie. "Like probably everybody else, I buy books and music from Amazon.com and audio books at Audible.com, and we rent movies from Netflix. I always shop for gifts online—ordering wine from different sites or chess sets and other novel stuff from Hammacher Schlemmer—and they gift wrap and ship it all, too. My husband loves REI for his camping gear. But we don't shop for stuff like TVs or digital cameras online. We need to see and mess around with those things before spending that kind of money."

The Rosens bought a computer online a few years ago, but they had some trouble, and instead of sending a technician to their home, the company sent components they had to swap out themselves, which they didn't feel capable of doing. In the end, they weren't satisfied with the customer service or return policy and know they won't buy a computer online when they're ready for a new one, either.



Julia Wu

BUSINESS WOMAN

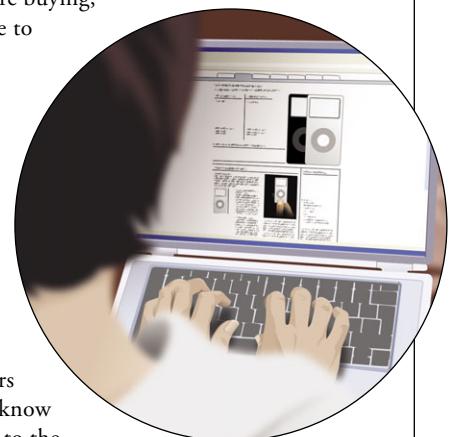
While she was in college at the University of Maryland at College Park, Julia worked in the IT department of the bookstore, helping her co-workers resolve their computer issues. After graduating with a degree in Resource Economics, Julia took a job with CapitalSource's IT department, and she's an in-house help-desk technician for about 500 people nationwide. The problems she's dealing with today are much more technical than the ones she resolved in college, but she loves what she does.

As for shopping online for a video recorder or a digital camera, Julia says, "I usually go to the store so that I can test out the product. I think that it is easier when you have all the products in front of you for comparison. Many digital cameras have the same specifications, but I like to test out the features and see how easily I can navigate through them."

But Julia does shop online for some things. She says, "I usually go online to shop for accessories for products I already have, especially if it's something hard to find, such as an outdated power supply." She's helped friends install parts, such as hard drives and additional memory, and because those are components she wouldn't necessarily have to see before buying,

Julia wouldn't hesitate to buy them online. She adds,

"For products that are brand specific, like the iPod, I would probably buy online, too, because I already know what I want, and you can usually find good deals online. But if I were just looking at MP3 players in general and didn't know what I wanted, I'd go to the store and look around."



exit



Keep Your Schedule Organized

Now that school's back in session, your family's schedule will get exponentially busier, and every mom needs a little help with keeping track of it all. Let these great CE devices keep you organized and on target for the entire school year.

Magellan RoadMate 860T

Ten minutes between soccer games on different fields? No problem!

www.magellangps.com
\$699.95



Digital Voice Recorder Pen and MP3 Player

A Post-it note and pen all in one
www.mp3playershome.com
\$169.95



Electronic Message Billboard

For the Grand Central Station that is your kitchen
www.gadgetuniverse.com
\$89.95



Talking Alarm Clock/Radio

Wake up to the day's weather report—no more waiting for the news
www.sharperimage.com
\$119.95



Shower Radio Clock With Caller ID

Screen your calls even from the tub
www.gadgetuniverse.com
\$49.95



PDA Data Bank Watch

School, doctor, violin teacher—all of their contact info at your fingertips
www.zyonshop.com
\$49.95



FM Pedometer

Keep track of your steps while you listen to tunes
www.sharperimage.com
\$39.95



Motorola Q

Cell phone, PDA, digital music player—this is an organizational dream
www.motorola.com
\$299.99





OLEVIA

www.olevia.com

ABC Warehouse Amazon.com American TV Beach Camera BJ's Wholesale Club Bosco's CompUSA Datavision Electronic Express Electronics Expo
Grant's Appliance hhgregg J&R Meijer Micro Center Office Depot R.C. Willey Stereo Advantage Target.com TigerDirect.com Walmart.com

Two for the Road...



MicroFiber Geneva
Large & Small



Finally a business case that complements your sense of style! The new Geneva Tote from Mobile Edge blends designer styling with real world functionality and superior notebook protection.

Designed for women by women, the Geneva Tote will keep you looking good no matter where the road takes you.

- **SafetyCell™ Computer Compartment** cushions and protects your notebook.
- **Quick Access Exterior Pockets** for airline tickets, cell phone and personal items.
- **Exclusive Wireless Security Shield Pocket™** that protects wireless devices from data theft, spam and viruses.
- **Detachable Cosmetics/Accessory Zippered Pouch.**
- **Exclusive No-Slip Straps** keep your case comfortably on your shoulder.
- **Available in Two Sizes** to accommodate all popular notebooks.



MOBILE EDGE
Bring It On.
www.mobileedge.com